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GLOBAL GUIDE

[Bangkok]

From the moment you check into your hotel, there is a buzz to Asia's City of Angels. With chic designer restaurants and bars, cutting-edge galleries, and boutiques showcasing classic haute-couture labels and such Thai designers as Thakoon Panichgul, whose creations are being worn by Michelle Obama, this is both a city of the future and a city of the past.

The key is not to be intimidated by its chaos. Don't take the easy option of jumping in an air-conditioned taxi, as you'll be stuck for hours in a jam. Instead, the futuristic Skytrain can rapidly transport you from the luxury shopping malls of Siam Square to the teeming Weekend Market at Chatuchak with 5,000 stalls.

After some serious pampering at the Peninsula Hotel's riverside spa, hop onto the Chao Phraya Express Boat, a public waterbus. Half an hour later, it arrives at the city's greatest temple, Wat Pho, and the magnificent Grand Palace with its Emerald Buddha.



John Brunton checks out the new rooftop nightspots

A new trend is for high-rise playgrounds crowning Bangkok's glittering skyscrapers. In-vogue designers, gourmet chefs, creative barmen and cool DJs are transforming the rooftops into ultra-fashionable lounge bars and restaurants. Crowds start taking the elevator to the sky from the moment the sun begins to set over the snaking Chao Phraya river. The most exclusive address is undoubtedly **Vertigo**, set 61 floors atop the Banyan Tree Hotel. The bar is packed from sundown but the ultimate experience is to reserve a table for dinner—the creative fusion cuisine features delicious dishes such as pan-fried curried foie gras on ginger, yellow chive tapenade and caramelised mango. A new arrival on the scene is **Zense**, a mere 17 floors up but with a fabulous panorama. The menu features dishes from five of the city's top restaurants, meaning diners can combine classic Thai and Japanese with Italian and Indian dishes. For cocktails, live jazz and celebrity-spotting, head over to **Sirocco** on the roof of the State Tower, which claims to be the world's highest alfresco restaurant. For a relaxed, casual ambience, call in at **Nest**, Le Fenix hotel's rooftop bar, a discreet insider address favoured by Bangkok locals who come here for the unique cocktails and wide selection of Cuban cigars.

www.banyantree.com; www.zensebangkok.com; www.lebua.com/bangkok; www.lefenix-sukhumvit.com



SWEET SENSATIONS

Chocolate lovers are making reservations long in advance for the new and totally decadent Chocolate Buffet, held every Wednesday afternoon in the historic Authors' Lounge of the **Mandarin Oriental**. Belgian pastry chef Fabrice Leblus tempts sweet-toothed gourmets with creations such as Lime and Manjari Chocolate Tart or Chocolate Chip Cheesecake. Chocoholics should also drop in to **Eat Me Restaurant**, whose Australian owner, Darren Hausler, has created an unforgettable vodka and Mars Bar cocktail.

www.mandarinoriental.com; www.eatmerestaurant.com

Old meets new



COLONIAL CHARM

Hidden off bustling Sukhumvit Road, **The Eugenia** boutique hotel is an oasis of colonial charm. This opulent mansion has become a favourite rendezvous for Afternoon Tea, served in a teak gazebo. The chic French manager, Merryll Rouchon, is introducing weekend brunch à la Française this spring.

www.theeugenia.com



THAI TALENTS

Every level of the futurist Emporium shopping mall is filled with luxury global boutiques. But head up to the top floor to discover innovative local Thai talent showcased in the **Thailand Creative & Design Centre**. There are exhibitions of up-and-coming designers, and a small shop filled with irresistible objects.

www.tcdc.or.th



PILLOW TALK

From the day it opened, **Bed Supperclub** has been the hippest haunt for dinner. The cuisine was almost secondary to the unique spaceship area where diners recline on beds and are served like Roman emperors. But since Australian chef Cameron Stuart has taken over, the cooking is as stunning as the setting.

www.bedsupperclub.com