



## Angkor, Cambodia (Pre Cruise Package)

### Overview

#### Introduction

Located 150 mi/240 km northwest of Phnom Penh, the ancient city of Angkor, Cambodia, is much larger than most visitors realize.

Angkor Archaeological Park was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1999. The word *Angkor* translates to "City of the King," and the park is home to world-famous Angkor Wat, the many stone faces of Bayon Temple and Angkor Thom, among the many other former capitals of the Khmer Empire, dating as far back as the ninth century.



There are more than 30 temples and ancient buildings in the Angkor area, including the most famous, Angkor Wat. The entire area is sometimes referred to by this name, though Angkor Wat correctly refers only to the one principal temple.

At high season, Angkor is bustling with visitors moving through the temple grounds and corridors. To avoid the crowds, it is best to visit in the low-season months of May-September, although even then, don't expect the area to be quiet.

Siem Reap is the town where travelers stay when visiting Angkor, just 5 mi/8 km away and 145 mi/235 km northwest of Phnom Penh. It is rapidly building a tourism infrastructure to cater to the demands of Western travelers.

### See & Do

#### Sightseeing

For the most part, visitors head to Angkor to see the ancient temples and buildings, and for good reason, although there are plenty of other sights in the area—enough to fill a week if you want to take your time. Travelers should schedule a minimum of two full days to explore the area, though many people see it on two tours of about three hours each.

The first day of a packaged tour is usually devoted to the Grand Circuit and takes in Angkor Wat at sunrise, then the sites of Preah Khan, Neak Pean and Ta Som with optional stops at Pre Rup and Prasat Kravan.

The second, called the Petit Circuit, winds its way through Angkor Thom, Victory Gate, Bayon, Ta Keo, Chau Say Tevoda, Ta Prohm, Thommanon, Srah Srang and Prasat Kravan.

Other sites that are sometimes not included on the tours but are worth seeing include Palilay, Terrace of the Elephants, Terrace of the Leper King, Baphuon, Phimeanakas, Tep Pranam and Khleang North and South.



You may also want to visit the Angkor Conservation Office (on the way to Siem Reap), which houses a large collection of statues removed from the complex.

## Historic Sites

All of the spectacular, carved-stone buildings in the Angkor complex were built AD 800-1400, the height of the Khmer empire. The city was attacked and abandoned in the 1400s. It was unknown to Europeans until French archaeologist Henri Mouhot came across the ruins in the mid-1800s. (There's some debate about whether Mouhot was really the first Westerner to see the site, but his account of finding Angkor drew the most attention.) Archaeologists worked for more than 100 years to restore and protect Angkor (as well as to carry home some of their favorite pieces). Despite their restoration efforts, the jungle has reclaimed parts of the ancient complex: Tree roots and vines are entangled with some structures, both supporting and destroying them. Angkor has also been subject to widely publicized looting—many of the Buddha statues no longer bear their heads.

*Note:* Because there are still land mines around some of the outlying temples, it's important to stay on the paths and not to wander on your own. Mines were laid around Angkor by the Phnom Penh government to keep Khmer Rouge guerrillas and archaeological poachers away from the site.

## Angkor Thom

The walled town of Angkor Thom does not include Angkor Wat, but it does include Bayon. Hours could be spent at this temple trying to follow the story lines of the spectacular bas-reliefs wrapped around the temple walls or exploring the myriad claustrophobic passageways. Be ready for surprises around any corner: monks tending small shrines or paper ornaments left as signs of devotion.

The image that most visitors never forget is of the 54 huge, surreal towers that rise from the temple. Each is topped with four giant faces barely smiling and staring out in the directions of the four points of the compass. The faces are identical—it's a Khmer royal ruler represented as a Buddhist deity—but because the height of the towers is staggered and each viewpoint is different, the design never feels repetitious.

The temple has a different atmosphere at different times of the day, but go at dawn: The smoke from early-morning cooking fires, mixed with morning mist, is pierced by the first golden rays of the sun and framed by gigantic, smiling faces—a sight never to be forgotten. However, the temple is particularly popular with visitors, and as the inner area is quite small, it can get crowded.

## Angkor Wat

The main temple and the best-preserved building in the complex, Angkor Wat is also the largest—its walls have a circumference of nearly a mile/kilometer. It's believed to be the largest religious structure in the world. It's particularly memorable at sunrise, when the light reflects off the water in the moat that surrounds it. Tour buses deposit hordes at Angkor Wat just before sunrise, but it's worth braving the crowds.

## Preah Khan

About 1.5 mi/2 km northeast of Angkor Thom stands Preah Khan. Once a monastery and training ground for monks and spellcasters, the buildings are now in ruins. The central complex is Buddhist, the northern and western sectors are devoted to the Hindu sets of Vishnu and Shiva, and the southern sector is dedicated to ancestor worship. Some of the temples and shrines are believed to have been in use as recently as the 17th century.



## Ta Prohm

Another must-see is Ta Prohm. This is the jungle temple of dreams—the forest has moved in to reclaim it, and huge fig trees, tangles of vines and creepers are among (and a part of) the sanctuaries and passageways. Ta Prohm gives visitors a sense of what it must have been like for the archaeologists who first rediscovered this fantastic, lost temple. Much like every other area, Ta Prohm attracts a steady stream of visitors trailing through its corridors and lining up to be photographed in front of the tree-covered ruins.

## Museums

### Landmine Museum

Ex-child soldier Aki Ra runs the Landmine Museum, which is 4 m/6 km south of Banteay Srey, 19 mi/31 km from Siem Reap. The museum began as a shanty-style shack displaying a variety of ordnance and offering information about mines and Cambodia's mine problem. It is now a formal museum backed by a charitable organization. The museum also operates a school for young mining victims and an orphanage. Mining victims and foreign volunteers staff the facility.

### Siem Reap, Cambodia (Pre Cruise Package)

## See & Do

### Sightseeing

There are a couple of good museums in the area, but be warned that you may find them disturbing. Oftentimes the best sightseeing in Siem Reap is simply relaxing outside, watching the people go by.



## Museums

### Angkor National Museum

No. 968, Vithei Charles de Gaulle, Phoum Salakanseng, Khom Svaydangum  
Siem Reap, Cambodia

**Phone:** 63-966-601

<http://www.angkornationalmuseum.com>

The Angkor National Museum is a worthwhile experience that explains the history of Angkor in a clear and concise manner. It also includes a stunning collection of more than 1,000 Buddha images.

Open daily.

## Nightlife

In the evening, relax on Pub Street or take a stroll around the boutiques and the night market looking for souvenirs and local crafts.

You can play a game of pool at Angkor What? bar, go late-night dancing at Temple Bar and get an open-air foot massage.



## Performing Arts

Tickets to traditional dance performances and shadow-puppet shows can be arranged through your hotel.

If you are fortunate enough to be in Siem Reap on a Saturday evening, don't miss a visit to the Kantha Bopha Center at Jayavarman VII Hospital (on the road to Angkor Wat) to hear the world-renowned Dr. Beat (Beatocello) Richner play Bach on his cello and talk about the activities of his children's hospitals. Consider donating blood while you are there.

## Shopping

For a taste of local life, head to the Phsar Leu (Central Market) on National Road No. 6 (not to be confused with the touristy Center Market in the middle of town).

After a morning spent temple-hopping, explore the Old Market in the French colonial center of town for local handicrafts—Cambodian silk, wooden musical instruments, wall hangings, shadow puppets, and wood and stone carvings.

## Dining

### Dining Overview

Take time out to rest at one of the French-style, open cafes and people-watch. Most restaurants in Siem Reap serve a mix of French, Thai and Cambodian cuisine, and some offer formal French dining.

Le Meridien Angkor, one of the finest upscale hotels in Siem Reap, regularly hosts a four-course set dinner within the temple grounds of Angkor. These spectacular evening events include transport to and from the venue, predinner cocktails and canapes, a two-hour dinner with wine and a beautifully choreographed Cambodian cultural performance with live music. It makes for a memorable evening in one of the world's most engaging locations. <http://www.lemeridien.com/angkor>.

For early-evening cocktails, drop in at the Park Hyatt Siem Reap, or for more of a colonial feel, try the Elephant at the Raffles Grand Hotel.

## Singapore

### Overview

#### Introduction

Singapore has always been a crossroads between East and West. Once upon a time, its port swelled with Chinese, Arab, Malay, Indian and European traders who went to exchange exotic wares. Today, the city-state has expanded to become one of the world's busiest ports, and over time, as goods have been exchanged, cultures have mingled as well. To the casual observer, Singapore appears to be a clean and orderly mass of shopping malls and





McDonald's. But the curious who dig a bit deeper will find that the cultures of the original settlers are still very much alive and well in this truly multicultural melting pot.

Singapore's dedication to preserving cultural heritage has created a number of excellent museums and thriving, ethnically distinct neighborhoods. Chinatown and Little India still retain some of their original cultural relevance for Singaporeans while attracting foreign visitors who marvel at the endurance of cultural identity. A stroll through any of the city's neighborhoods will reveal Taoist temples, Muslim mosques and Christian churches cohabitating peaceably side by side. Cultural intermingling has also produced unique Eurasian and Peranakan (Straits Chinese) cultures, each with its own fashion, furnishings and food.

Speaking of food, with so much cultural diversity, dining in Singapore is varied and good—gastronomic experiences range from the finest Continental cuisine served with polished silver to delicious local dishes served in an open-air hawker center with plastic chopsticks. It's a small wonder Singaporeans love to eat.

Singapore is both an island and a country, but perhaps it is best described as a city-state. Like the great city-states of the past, it offers civilization and order in the highest degree. Its combination of Western-style development and Eastern-style order seems to present the best of both hemispheres: It's a modern metropolis where you feel safe walking the streets, and it's an Asian business center that's a model of efficiency. Singapore is also an ethnically mixed city, and close to one-quarter of its population is made up of expatriates or foreign workers from all over the world. Known for its desire to become the technology hub of Asia, Singapore is the most wired country in the region.

Another trait Singapore shares with historical city-states: Its authorities strongly believe that they can safeguard the status quo with regulations against almost anything and everything that—in their view—could possibly upset the sense of tranquility. It is important to note that in terms of cultural values, Singapore is a relatively conservative society compared with most Western countries and even other developed cities in Asia. Controversial topics such as same-sex marriage and religion should be approached with sensitivity. In reality, visitors will find the place is not as restrictive as suggested by the long lists of hefty fines for such things as littering and jaywalking. Some visitors to Singapore leave singing the praises of a society that "works," but others feel the government's near-compulsive fixation on cleanliness and order makes Singapore sterile in every sense of the word.

## Highlights

**Sights**—The colonial grandeur of Raffles Hotel; the National Orchid Garden at Singapore Botanic Gardens and the futuristic Gardens by the Bay; Singapore's nightscape, seen from atop Mount Faber or the Sands SkyPark observation deck; the Hindu temples and sari shops of Little India; the Thian Hock Keng Temple and the Buddha Tooth Relic Temple in Chinatown; the kitsch Chinese mythology on display at Haw Par Villa theme park; the theater and concerts at the durian-shaped Esplanade-Theatres on the Bay.

**Museums**—Modern art from Asia at the Singapore Art Museum; a glimpse of Indian, Chinese and Southeast Asian cultures at the Asian Civilisations Museum and the Peranakan Museum; the beautifully restored National Museum of Singapore.



**Memorable Meals**—Spicy chili or black pepper crabs at the East Coast Seafood Centre; juicy Kobe steaks at CUT by Wolfgang Puck; authentic Tokyo sushi at Shinji by Kanesaka; exquisite Chinese fare at Summer Pavilion Restaurant; an Indian feast at Rang Mahal; dining in a classic black-and-white colonial bungalow at P.S. Cafe at Harding Road; inexpensive and authentic local fare from an outdoor hawker center.

**Late Night**—Live jazz at Harry's @ Boat Quay; live blues at the Crazy Elephant; bar-hopping at St. James Power Station; all night beach parties on Sentosa Island; late-night *shisha* water pipes at Arab Street; or hanging out with nocturnal creatures at the Night Safari.

**Walks**—Taking in Singapore's colonial heritage at and around the grassy *Padang* (an open field in the heart of downtown), starting from Raffles Hotel and ending up at nearby Boat Quay or Clifford Pier; a jaunt through busy Chinatown anytime or an after-dark stroll through nearby Club Street; a walk down Little India's Serangoon Road; perusing hip shops and cafes along Arab Street.

**Especially for Kids**—The thrilling amusement park rides at Universal Studios Singapore; a cable car ride to Sentosa Island, with its thrilling rides and miniature golf; Jurong Bird Park; many different attractions and animal shows at the Singapore Zoo; rides and interactive exhibits at the Singapore Discovery Centre; enjoying man-made snow and a snow-covered hill at Snow City.

## Geography

Singapore's strategic location at the southern tip of the Malaysian peninsula has ensured its importance, which is greater than its size might seem to justify. Singapore consists of the island of Singapore and some 63 islets within its territorial waters. The main island is about 26 mi/42 km from west to east and 14 mi/23 km from north to south. Total land area is 264 sq mi/683 sq km, about three times the size of Washington, D.C. It's a mostly undulating country with low hills (the highest, 540-ft/166-m Bukit Timah Hill, is to the northwest of the city).

Singapore's Central Business District (or CBD, as it is called locally) actually spreads across both the central and southern parts of the island (you'll know when you're there—it boasts striking high-rise structures designed by such world-famous architects as I.M. Pei and Kenzo Tange). You can get a good visual orientation to the city as you cross the Benjamin Sheares Bridge on the East Coast Parkway, which links the airport to the city center. The Singapore cityscape looks magnificent, particularly at night when buildings are brilliantly lit. Offshore, there appears to be another city all lit up because of the many ships anchored there—Singapore is one of the two busiest seaports in the world, along with Hong Kong.

Naturally, many of the city's attractions are clustered closely together. Orchard Road, the shopper's haven, is located in the northern part of the city center. Chinatown, where you'll find the charming restaurants of Boat Quay, is just to the southeast of Orchard Road, and Little India is northeast. Sentosa Island, with its many amusements, is directly to the southwest of the city center. These frequently visited neighborhoods, as well as more suburban areas, remain a bustling hive of pedestrian activity well into the evening.



## History

The earliest records of Singapore date back to the second century AD, where it was identified as a trading post. In the 11th century, it was part of the Indian Srivijaya Empire, and in the 14th century, it was ruled by the Javanese Majapahit empire. It was an important trading center of the Sultanate of Johore in the 16th and early 17th century, until Portuguese raiders burned it down. It faded into obscurity until 1819, when Sir Stamford Raffles established the British East India Company's presence in Singapore. This began the city's status as a free port and British colony. As thousands of Chinese, Indians and Malays flocked to the island, Raffles maintained control by segregating the city into ethnic neighborhoods: the Chinese in Chinatown, Indians in Little India and Muslims on Arab Street. This division had the unintended effect of preserving the distinct cultures you can find there today.

Singapore flourished during the mid-1800s, as the Industrial Revolution in the West created a demand for rubber and other Asian raw materials. The introduction of steamship travel and the opening of the Suez Canal brought the East and West closer than ever. Thanks to its strategic location and port status, Singapore boomed.

The country remained under the control of the British until it was captured by the Japanese at the start of World War II—one of the most embarrassing defeats in British history. After the war, the Allies' plan to unite Singapore with Malaysia was scuttled by Malaysian nationalist groups who feared that the ethnic Chinese would dominate the less populous Malays. The plan for a union was revived in the 1950s by Singapore's prime minister, Lee Kuan Yew, who believed his country could not survive without the natural resources of Malaysia. Lee realized his dream in 1963 when Singapore was united with Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak. But the union lasted only 23 months with much racial and political tension—Malay leaders, shocked to see Lee's party attempt to become a national force, unceremoniously tossed Singapore out of the federation.

Since then, and contrary to Lee's fears, Singapore has done very well on its own. Under the stable authoritarian leadership of Lee and his handpicked successor, Goh Chok Tong, the country has averaged more than 8% growth annually and become a major service and transportation hub. Although much of the rest of Asia suffered a steep economic decline at the end of the 1990s, Singapore's bustling economy merely slowed down.

In 2004, Singapore elected a new prime minister to succeed Goh Chok Tong, Lee Hsien Loong, who had been groomed for the role by his father, Lee Kuan Yew. The Singapore government continues to be ruled by Lee's party, with little tolerance for dissent. However, corruption is very low, and the economy is back on track. The government maintains a firm grip on politics but has allowed greater expression in media and the arts, a signal of its emerging understanding that creativity is essential to the kind of technological innovation Singapore seeks.

Today, Singapore's melting pot continues to draw new immigrants. The Economic Development Board has successfully spearheaded initiatives over the past decade to draw some of the world's top talent in industries critical to Singapore's economic vitality, particularly in areas such as finance, wealth management, higher education, and research and development. An influx of high-net-worth individuals (such as Facebook co-founder Eduardo Saverin) has driven the market for luxury housing sky high, with new, super-luxury apartment buildings mushrooming in every corner of the city's downtown, posh neighborhoods and waterfront districts.



## Snapshot

Among Singapore's main attractions are shopping, eating, the Singapore Zoo and Night Safari, excellent museums, cultural events and festivals. Those who like to shop, who want to take a comfort break from traveling through less-developed Southeast Asian countries, or who enjoy various cultural festivals will want to visit Singapore.

Given Singapore's central-Southeast Asia location and its state-of-the-art airport with frequently scheduled flights to just about everywhere, we recommend combining Singapore with a visit to another country in the region—we found it to be an ideal complement to neighbouring countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia.

## Port Information

### Location

The Singapore Cruise Centre (SCC@HarbourFront) has arrival and departure facilities, security equipment, a Singapore Tourism Board information center, cafes, shops, baggage services, ATMs and money changers, but it can handle only smaller cruise vessels. Larger cruise ships must dock at Pasir Panjang, a ferry terminal that, while operated and managed by SCC, sits amid the container port not far from SCC@HarbourFront, where the ships clear immigration for entry to Singapore. Buses shuttle passengers to SCC@HarbourFront from SCC@Pasir Panjang. At SCC@HarbourFront, there are plenty of taxis, an MRT train station and VivoCity, Singapore's largest shopping center.  
<http://www.singaporecruise.com>.

To better accommodate large international cruise ships, a S\$500-million Marina Bay Cruise Centre (or International Cruise Terminal) near the Marina South Pier has been built. Its 300,000-sq-ft/28,000-sq-m blueprint, about the size of three football fields, makes it one of the largest terminals in Asia.

## Potpourri

Immigration figures show that at any given time, 25% of Singapore's resident population is made up of foreigners who have traveled there to work, either alone or with their families. Of these foreigners, Western expats make up a small percentage: Most arrive as "guest workers" from India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and the Philippines to build skyscrapers or clean homes for the island's upwardly mobile population.

The name "Singapore" derives from the Sanskrit term "Singapura" which means Lion City. There are no lions in Singapore, but a popular legend tells of an 11th-century Sumatran prince named Sang Nila Utama, who went there on a hunting trip and saw a wild animal that resembled a lion (it was most probably a tiger). He thought this was an auspicious sign and decided to build a new city there as part of the Srivijaya empire.

The Merlion, Singapore's national symbol (a lion head on a fish body), does not find its origins in ancient lore. It was invented by the Singapore Tourism Board in 1972 to attract tourists.

Contrary to popular belief, it is legal to chew gum in Singapore. It is illegal to buy it, sell it or dispose of it in an improper way. Visitors may take small quantities for their own consumption.





It is illegal to use a toilet without flushing. To protect its citizens from this oversight, which carries a fine, the government introduced self-flushing toilets in most public areas around the island. Many hotels, restaurants and shopping malls have followed suit.

Singlish, a unique English-based creole peppered with Chinese, Indian and Malay words, is spoken widely across the country, especially among blue-collar classes. While the average Singaporean also speaks proper English, the slang's rising popularity has caused government concern, as seen by the Speak Good English Movement, a government initiative that encourages Singaporeans to discard the local syntax.

The Singapore Sling was first served in 1915 by a Hainanese-Chinese bartender named Mr. Ngiam Tong-Boon, who worked at the Long Bar in the Raffles Hotel. Today, the cherry-pink cocktail has become synonymous with the island nation, and the Long Bar is estimated to whip up almost a thousand Slings per day. Dust off the credit card, however. At the Long Bar, Singapore's signature drink comes with the very modern price tag of S\$30.

At just 253 sq mi/655 sq km, Singapore is one of the world's smallest countries. Yet with a population nearing 5 million people, it's also one of the world's most densely populated countries, just after Monaco.

## See & Do

### Sightseeing

Although a small island, Singapore offers a broad range of sightseeing options, thanks to its ethnic and religious diversity. And not all attractions are associated with modern, urban Singapore: Surviving enclaves of the early migrant settlers dot various parts of the island.

The country's nerve center during the days of British rule, the Colonial District still has the regal charm of the original British government buildings and living quarters. Sites include the old Parliament House (which sits back-to-back with the current Parliament House completed in 1999), the National Museum of Singapore (it has a remarkable jade collection), the waterfront Fullerton Hotel (formerly the central post office building) and St. Andrew's Cathedral.

Belatedly, Singapore has curbed its aggressive campaign to replace old buildings with new ones and has begun revitalizing some of its most cherished landmarks. Empress Place, which now houses the Asian Civilisations Museum, the waterfront's Clarke Quay and the Raffles Hotel (birthplace of the Singapore Sling) have all been restored to highly polished versions of their former glory. For the most part, neighborhood restorations are relatively small in scale—they're more like exhibits than neighborhoods—but with a little imagination, you can get a feel for Singapore's colorful past.

Many of the top attractions, including the National Orchid Garden at the Singapore Botanic Gardens, and the Chinese and Japanese Gardens, are best enjoyed on foot in the morning, the coolest part of the day, or in the early evening. Maps of established walking trails are available at the entrances and at the tourist offices. Among the other attractions that should not be missed: Little India's Sri Veeramakaliamman temple or Chinatown's Thian Hock Keng temple, and the Singapore Zoo and Night Safari. For those who want to get a feel for the bustling lives of the locals, we recommend taking the MRT trains to any of Singapore's outlying districts, especially Katong in the East, Geylang (the area near the Paya Lebar station), Pasir Ris or Toa Payoh.



## Historic Sites

The cultures of the early migrants and British colonials—as well as other marks of Singapore's rich history—have left behind fascinating historical sites. The city center showcases the best of colonial architecture as well as memorials dedicated to the heroes of World War II.

### Arts House at the Old Parliament

1 Old Parliament Lane  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6332-6900, or 6332-6919 for the ticket hotline

<http://www.theartshouse.com.sg>

Renamed to denote its use as a multifunctional arts and concert space, this neo-Palladian structure was designed in 1827 by Colonial architect Sir George Coleman as a private home for a well-known merchant, but it was sequestered shortly afterward for government duty to house parliament. Parliament has since moved to the huge granite structure next door, and in 2003 the old structure reopened as a space for arts events, socials and lectures. It is also home to cafes and bars. Check out the bronze elephant in front of the building, a gift from King Chulalongkorn of Siam (now Thailand) in 1871.

Daily 11 am-9 pm. Box office open Monday-Friday 10 am-8 pm, Saturday 11 am-8 pm. Closed Sunday, except 90 minutes before shows for collection of tickets. Free.

### Buddha Tooth Relic Temple and Museum

288 South Bridge Road  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6220-0220

<http://www.btrts.org.sg>

The major attraction of this five-story, red-and-white Buddhist complex built in the Tang Dynasty style and consecrated in 2008 is the left canine tooth of the Buddha, which is believed to have been recovered from his funeral pyre in Kushinagar, Northern India. The tooth is only shown on Chinese New Year and Vesak Day, which commemorates the birth and enlightenment of Buddha and his entry into nirvana. The relic is encased in a 926-lb/420-kg solid-gold stupa on the fourth floor. This magnificent shrine is unveiled daily 9 am-noon and 3-6 pm, when it can be admired from the public viewing area (no photography allowed). The third-floor Buddhist Cultural Museum has rare artifacts on display illustrating the story of Buddhism and its different traditions in various Asian countries. Start your visit in the huge 100 Dragons Hall on the first floor, where you can see a sitting 15-ft/4.5-m Maitreya Buddha. Do not miss the peaceful rooftop garden, which features a huge enameled prayer wheel inside the Ten Thousand Buddhas Pavilion. Free vegetarian meals are served in the dining hall.

Open daily 7 am-7 pm including public holidays. Free entry, but donations are welcome.

### Tiger Sky Tower

Located next to the Sentosa cable car station  
Sentosa Island, Singapore

<http://www.skytower.com.sg>

Singapore's tallest public viewing tower offers panoramic views across Singapore, Sentosa and the Southern Islands. With a capacity of 72 in its enclosed, air-conditioned cabin, the tower offers guests an



informative commentary on key points of interest. Each revolving ride takes approximately seven minutes. Day or night, the views look all the way to Malaysia and neighboring Indonesian islands.

Daily 9 am-9 pm, last admission 8:45 pm. S\$15 adults, S\$10 children.

## CHIJMES

30 Victoria St. (take the MRT to City Hall)  
Singapore, Singapore 187996

**Phone:** 6337-7810

<http://www.chijmes.com.sg>

Formerly the site of the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus (hence the partial acronym, pronounced *chimes*), CHIJMES is a charming blend of historical architecture and modern restoration. This former convent school and orphanage has cloistered courtyards and a beautiful Gothic chapel, erected in 1890, showcasing plasterwork, delicate wall frescoes and stained glass. The Caldwell House has a sunken forecourt, waterfalls and fountains. After a 1996 restoration that cost S\$100 million, the complex is now home to numerous boutiques, art shops and galleries, along with a lavish selection of restaurants, wine bars and cafes, making it one of Singapore's entertainment hot spots.

Shops open around 11 am, and most restaurants, pubs and clubs open in the evening. Free.

## Hajjah Fatimah Mosque

4001 Beach Road (take the MRT to Lavender station EW11 and walk toward Beach Road)  
Singapore, Singapore

Built in 1846 by Hajjah Fatimah, a wealthy businesswoman, this little mosque represents the best of Singaporean Muslim life—its architectural style combines influences from many cultures: Malay, Chinese, Middle Eastern, Indian and Western. The minaret leans to one side and has an interesting Christian symbol, a bleeding heart, on the outside.

Daily 9 am-9 pm. No visiting is permitted during Friday prayers 11:30 am-2:30 pm. Free.

## Istana

Orchard Road (take the MRT to Dhoby Ghuat station)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6737-5522

<http://www.istana.gov.sg>

The official residence of the elected president of Singapore. Although he chooses not to live there, the compound, which was built in 1869, is still used for state occasions. *Istana* means "palace" in the Malay language. During British colonial rule, it was known as Government House and it was where the governor resided. The grounds are only open to the public at the president's discretion, generally on five public holidays: New Year's Day, the first day of the Lunar New Year, Hari Raya Puasa, Christmas and Deepavali. Visitors are then invited to stroll the gardens and take a tour of the rooms inside the Istana. Check with your hotel or a newspaper for information about opening times, typically 8:30 am-6 pm.

S\$1 for foreign visitors.



## Kranji War Memorial and Cemetery

9 Woodlands Road (take the MRT to Kranji station and either walk five minutes or take SBS Bus 170 from Rochor Road)

Singapore, Singapore

A peaceful cemetery north of the city center on a slope overlooking the Straits of Johor, this is a memorial to those Allied troops who lost their lives during the Japanese occupation. It was started by prisoners of war during the Japanese Occupation of 1942-1945.

Daily 7 am-6 pm. Free.

## Lian Shan Shuang Lin Temple

184 E. Jalan Toa Payoh (take the MRT to Toa Payoh, or take a taxi)

Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6259-6924

<http://www.shuanglin.sg>

Built in 1908, this ornate Chinese temple follows the architectural tradition of the Chinese province of Fujian and incorporates three distinct regional design styles. Shuang Lin is well-known for its exquisite workmanship and beautifully carved Buddhas.

Daily 7:30 am-5 pm. Free.

## Merlion

Fullerton Road (in Merlion Park; take the MRT to Raffles Place)

Singapore, Singapore

Half lion, half fish, this mythical creature is the official symbol of Singapore. Interestingly, Merlion sprung from the minds of clever tourism marketing teams rather than local legend. However, the city's name is derived from Singapura, meaning Lion City. Built in 1972, the 28-ft/8.6-m Merlion statue stands across the bay from the Esplanade-Theatres on the Bay. There is a 6.5-ft/2-m Merlion cub statue behind it. A 12-story Merlion also resides on nearby Sentosa Island and offers a panoramic view of Sentosa and southern parts of Singapore.

## Raffles Hotel

1 Beach Road (take the MRT to City Hall)

Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6337-1886

<http://www.raffles.com/singapore>

This grande dame from 1827 is a must-see and possibly Asia's most charming hotel. An extensive renovation years ago restored its colonial grandeur to reflect the days when writers Noel Coward and Somerset Maugham, along with other members of the colonial elite, frequented the establishment, particularly at cocktail hour. The spacious courtyards, ballroom, old cake and pastry store, and jewelry shops help to recall the glorious past, and chic art galleries keep the vibe alive. The Long Bar, where the Singapore Sling was invented, is accessed through a side entrance, not through the lobby—hotel staff will redirect you. On the third floor, a museum details the history of the hotel.

Museum open daily 10 am-7 pm; the hotel's public spaces are open daily 24 hours. Free.



## Sakya Muni Buddha Gaya Temple

366 Race Course Road (take the MRT to Dhoby Ghaut station, then get a taxi or take SBS bus 64, 65, 106 or 111 from Orchard Road)  
Singapore, Singapore

Known as the Temple of a Thousand Lights, this is one of the very few Theravada Buddhist temples in Singapore. Built in 1927 by a Thai monk, it houses a 49-ft-/15-m-high, 300-ton Buddha illuminated by colored lights. The temple contains a bit of bark that is believed by Buddhists to come from the bodhi tree in Nepal beneath which the Buddha himself attained enlightenment. At its base, a fresco portrays important events in the Buddha's life. Behind the main altar, find the doorway to the reclining Buddha chamber underneath. Photographing the reclining Buddha is prohibited.

Daily 8 am-4:45 pm. Free.

## Sands SkyPark Observation Deck

10 Bayfront Ave. (take the MRT to Bayfront station; enter at Hotel Tower 3 porte cochere)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 65-6688-8826

<http://www.marinabaysands.com/sands-skypark.html>

A major attraction at the Marina Bay Sands integrated resort is Sands SkyPark, a 3-acre/1.2-hectare cantilevered boat-shaped platform with lush gardens and hundreds of trees and plants connecting the top of the hotel blocks. SkyPark is 787 ft/340 m long and overhangs the north tower by 220 ft/67 m. The open-air observation deck is open to the public, and the 360-degree views from the 56th floor, over the city's skyline, Marina Bay and out to the sea, are truly spectacular. It's best to visit in the early morning or at sunset.

Sands SkyPark is open daily 9:30 am-10 pm (till 11 pm Friday-Sunday) but closes during lightning, extreme rain and private events. Call ahead to confirm it is open. Tickets are S\$22 adults, S\$19 seniors, S\$16 children. You can purchase them at the box office, one level beneath the third hotel tower.

## Singapore Flyer

30 Raffles Ave.  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6333-3311

<http://www.singaporeflyer.com>

Situated on the southeast tip of the Marina Center amid some of the city's best shopping, dining and entertainment, the 541-ft/165-m Singapore Flyer is the tallest Ferris wheel in the world. (It's even 16 ft/5 m taller than the London Eye). With 28 capsules holding 28 passengers each, those at the top enjoy sweeping views, not just of Singapore, but also the Indonesian islands of Batam and Bintan, and Johor, Malaysia. The Singapore Flyer originally turned in a counterclockwise direction (one rotation takes 37 minutes) until Feng Shui masters advised a clockwise rotation.

Daily 8:30 am-10:30 pm. Tickets cost S\$29.50 adults, S\$20.65 children and include a visit of the multimedia showcase *Journey of Dreams*. Its seven galleries tell the story of Singapore and the Singapore Flyer.



## Skyline Sentosa Luge

Between Imbiah Lookout and Siloso Beach  
Sentosa Island, Singapore

<http://www.skylineluge.com>

A fun, family-friendly way to experience Sentosa Island is to go on a sky luge, which is part go-cart, part toboggan. After that, board the Skyride chairlift down to enjoy a panoramic view of Singapore.

Daily 10 am-9:30 pm. Luge and Skyride combo S\$15 per person.

## Sri Mariamman Temple

244 South Bridge Road (take the MRT to City Hall Station, then take SBS bus 103, 166 or 197 or SMRT Bus 61 from North Bridge Road)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6223-4064

<http://www.heb.gov.sg/temples/8-sri-mariamman-temple>

This magnificent structure is Singapore's oldest Hindu temple and is dedicated to Sri Mariamman, a manifestation of the Great Goddess, worshipped for health and prosperity. The brick foundation of the present structure was built around 1843. Over the years, bells, carvings of deities, and frescoes have been added to its doors, walls and ceiling. The annual fire-walking festival (Thimithi) is celebrated there, usually in October or November. As a sign of respect, remove your shoes before entering and do not wear shorts or sleeveless tops.

Daily 7 am-noon and 6-9 pm. Free.

## Sri Srinivasa Perumal Temple

397 Serangoon Road (take the MRT to Farrer Park)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6298-5771

<http://www.heb.gov.sg/temples/18-sri-srinivasa-perumal-temple>

Dating from 1855, this temple, devoted to the worship of Vishnu, is listed as a national monument. Smaller than Sri Mariamman, but at least as brilliantly decorated and festooned on the outside with deities great and minor, it is a prime example of Hindu temples as works of devout art. This temple is the starting point for the Thaipusam Festival every January or February, when devotees pierce their bodies and carry *kavadis*, colorfully adorned steel racks attached to the body with steel pokers, as they parade through the streets to Chettiar Temple on Tank Road.

Daily 7 am-noon and 6-9 pm. Free.

## Sri Veeramakaliamman Temple

114 Serangoon Road (take the MRT to Little India station; the temple is a short walk from there)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6295-4538

<http://www.sriveeramakaliamman.com>

At the center of Little India's Serangoon Road, this colorful temple, constructed in 1855 by Bengali laborers, is dedicated to the female deity Kali, consort of Shiva, although hundreds of other immortals are



depicted on the temple's colorful sloping roof and inside the main prayer hall. Tiny bells cover the front door, which devotees ring to ask God to grant them personal requests before entering the prayer hall. Inside, Kali's statue, with 16 arms and wearing a necklace of skulls, is at the center of the prayer hall, flanked by those of her two sons, Ganesh and Murugan.

Daily 5:30 am-2 pm and 4-9 pm. Free.

## St. Andrew's Cathedral

11 St. Andrew's Road (take the MRT to City Hall)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6337-6104

<http://www.livingstreams.org.sg/sac>

Built in 1861, St. Andrew's was constructed by Indian convict laborers using *chunam*, a plaster made of lime from seashells, egg whites and coarse sugar mixed with the hulls of coconuts. Especially noted for its fine, classical lines and an impressive stained-glass window, the cathedral was converted into a temporary hospital before the city was occupied by the Japanese in early 1942. Today, Anglicans again worship at this site, and the cathedral offers visitors a tranquil respite from city life.

Daily 9 am-5 pm. Free.

## Statues of Sir Stamford Raffles

There are two statues in memory of the man who founded modern Singapore in 1819. The original stands outside the Victoria Concert Hall at Empress Place and was cast in 1887, and a replica stands behind the old Parliament House on North Boat Quay, the site where it is believed that Raffles first set foot on the island. Take the MRT to Raffles Place and walk across the Cavenagh Bridge.

## Sultan Mosque

3 Muscat St. (take the MRT to Bugis station and walk toward North Bridge Road)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6293-4405

<http://www.sultanmosque.org.sg>

The spiritual heart of Singapore's Muslim community, this large mosque is the center point of Kampong Glam, the district given to the Malay royalty who oversaw Singapore before Raffles' arrival. The building you see today was built in 1928, replacing the mosque previously on the site. Its golden onion dome and minarets belie the fact that it was designed by Irish architect Denis Santry. Non-Muslim visitors are free to walk the grounds outside the mosque; they are also invited inside—at the door, visitors can find cloaks to cover themselves if they are not properly attired—but they cannot enter the main prayer hall.

Monday-Thursday, Saturday and Sunday 9:30 am-noon and 2-4 pm; Friday 2:30-4:30 pm. No visiting is permitted during Friday prayers 11:30 am-2:30 pm. Free.



## Thian Hock Keng Temple

158 Telok Ayer St. (take the MRT to Tanjong Pagar or Raffles Place)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6423-4616

<http://www.thianhockkeng.com.sg/home.html>

One of the oldest temples in Singapore, erected in 1821, "The Temple of Heavenly Bliss" is dedicated to Ma Po Cho, "The Mother of Heavenly Sages" and the Taoist deity who protects those who travel far from home. Even the materials used to construct the temple reflect the far shores, with ironwork from Scotland, tiles from England and the Netherlands, and soaring granite pillars with dragons carved in China. Early Chinese sailors, upon completing a safe journey to Singapore, offered thanks to her at this shrine. Before massive land reclamation extended the shoreline outward, this site was on the beach. Inside the temple, you can also find an altar to Kuan Yin, the goddess of compassion, and a display of ancestral tablets and remembrances of esteemed members of the temple's community. Temple restoration in 2000 uncovered a 1907 calligraphic panel from the Qing dynasty Empress Dowager Cixi.

Daily 7:30 am-5:30 pm. Free.

## Wak Hai Cheng Bio Temple

30-B Phillip St. (take the MRT to Raffles Place)  
Singapore, Singapore

Surrounded by urban skyscrapers, Wak Hai Cheng Bio seems oddly out of place. Inside its two temple chambers are altars for "The Mother of Heavenly Sages," Ma Po Cho, who safeguards those who travel, and Siong Tek Kong, the deity who oversees all business affairs—most appropriate for Singapore's commerce-minded immigrant population.

Daily 6 am-6 pm.

## Museums

### Images of Singapore Museum

Imbiah Lookout (MRT to Harbourfront then take the cable car or the Sentosa bus from HarbourFront Interchange or the Sentosa Express from VivoCity to Imbiah Station)  
Sentosa Island, Singapore

**Phone:** 6275-0426

<http://www.sentosa.com.sg/en/attractions/imbiah-lookout/images-of-singapore>

This museum makes a wide sweep of Singapore's past and present. Interactive exhibits depict Singapore's diverse cultural traditions, such as the Chinese Festival of the Hungry Ghost and the Hindu Thimithi (also known as the fire-walking festival). The wax figures in one popular display depict the British surrender to Japanese forces in 1942, and a film shows the actual surrender. Other exhibits focus on customs practiced by Malay, Chinese, Indian and Peranakan (Chinese-Malay) communities. One section, *Stories of the Sea*, tells Singapore's maritime history through the eyes of an amusing Chinese merchant.

Daily 9 am-7 pm (last entry at 6:30 pm). Free guided tours Friday-Sunday and public holidays at 11 am and 2 pm. S\$10 adults, S\$7 children.





## Asian Civilisations Museum

1 Empress Place (take the MRT to City Hall)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6332-7798

<http://www.acm.org.sg>

Empress Place, a handsome Victorian building that served administrative purposes, was renovated and is now the Asian Civilisations Museum, showcasing an excellent display of cultural and anthropological exhibits with more than 1,300 artifacts covering the major civilizations of China, India, Korea, Japan and Southeast Asia, from prehistory through the present day. The museum also welcomes international touring exhibits and organizes regularly scheduled culture and history lectures.

Monday 1-7 pm, Tuesday-Sunday 9 am-7 pm (Friday till 9 pm). Free guided tours in English Monday at 2 pm; Tuesday-Friday at 11 am, noon and 2 pm; Saturday and Sunday at 11 am, and 2, 3 and 4 pm. S\$8 adults (discounted admission after 7 pm Friday).

## Changi Chapel and Museum

1000 Upper Changi North Road (take the MRT to Tanah Merah station and take a taxi to the museum, which is to the left of the prison's main gate)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6214-2451

<http://www.changimuseum.sg>

Located about 25 minutes from the Central Business District, the chapel is a replica of the original built by Allied prisoners of war during World War II. The museum houses photos, sketches and personal items dating from the Japanese occupation of 1942-45. Most of the items were donated by former prisoners of war.

Daily 9:30 am-5 pm (last entry at 4:30 pm). Free.

## Chinatown Heritage Centre

48 Pagoda St. (take the MRT to Chinatown station)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6325-2879

<http://www.chinatownheritagecentre.sg>

In the center of the historic Chinatown walking district, in three adjacent preserved prewar shop-houses, this museum has 15 galleries with displays that depict the lives and experiences of early Chinese migrants to Singapore. Rooms show scenes from Chinese work, home and social life.

Daily 9 am-8 pm (last entry 7 pm). S\$10 adults, S\$6 children ages 3-12.

## Malay Heritage Museum

85 Sultan Gate (take the MRT to Bugis station)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6391-0450

<http://www.malayheritage.org.sg>



The building that houses the Malay Heritage Museum was the *istana* (palace) granted to the Malay royal family that originally oversaw Singapore in the days before Raffles' arrival. The *istana* suffered decades of neglect and ownership squabbles until the state took it over, renovated and converted it into this cultural exhibit that depicts the everyday lives and religious and cultural ceremonies of the Malays in Singapore.

Daily except Monday 10 am-6 pm. S\$4 adults, S\$2 seniors, S\$2 students.

## National Museum of Singapore

93 Stamford Road (exit the Dhoby Ghaut MRT station and walk Orchard Road east to Stamford Road)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6332-3659 or 6332-5642

<http://www.nationalmuseum.sg>

The original 1887 structure has been expanded to gorgeous effect, with larger exhibition spaces and a basement theater. Choose from the Singapore History Gallery, an exhibit covering 400 years of local history, or the Singapore Living Galleries, covering the everyday life of Singaporeans with themes such as food and fashion.

History Gallery open daily 10 am-6 pm (last admission 5:30 pm); Living Galleries open daily 10 am-8 pm (last admission 7:30 pm). English-language tours of History Gallery Monday-Friday 11 am and 2 pm; Saturday and Sunday 11:30 am, and 2 and 3:30 pm. S\$10 adults, S\$6 children younger than 18 with valid student pass; free for children younger than 6. Family package (three adults and two children) S\$30.

## Peranakan Museum

39 Armenian St. (take the MRT to City Hall or Raffles City stations)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6332-7591

<http://www.peranakanmuseum.sg>

This spiffy interactive museum, a small branch of the Asian Civilisations Museum housed in a beautiful old white villa from 1910, illustrates the story and hybrid culture of the Peranakan people. These locally born people are descended from immigrants who married local, mostly Malay women. The largest Peranakan group in Singapore is the Straits Chinese, who speak a mix of Bahasa Malay, Hokkien dialect and English. The ancestors of Chitty Melaka and Jawi Peranakan were Indian traders who married local Malay women and also have their own unique traditions. The most colorful displays pertain to the lavish marriage traditions. A traditional Peranakan wedding spans 12 days and requires complicated rites. Admire fine textiles featuring intricate embroidery and beading, teak furniture and the porcelain decorated in typical Peranakan colors of delicate pink, blue, green and yellow. Multimedia displays are state of the art.

Monday 1-7 pm, Tuesday-Sunday 9:30 am-7 pm (Friday until 9 pm). Tickets are S\$6 adults, S\$3 for children.



## Red Dot Design Museum

28 Maxwell Road (take the MRT Tanjong Pagar)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6327-8027

<http://www.red-dot.sg>

A creative hub housed in the former Singapore Traffic Police headquarters, this museum showcases commercial design excellence from around the world. The museum also bestows the annual Red Dot Award for innovative design concepts. Interactive installations and interesting exhibitions engage visitors while educating on design. It is also the venue for MAAD (Market for Artists and Designers), a recurring Sunday market for original creative works.

Monday, Tuesday and Friday 11 am-6 pm; Saturday and Sunday 11 am-8 pm. S\$8 adults, S\$4 children.

## Singapore Art Museum

71 Bras Basah Road (take the MRT to City Hall or Dhoby Ghaut)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6332-3222

<http://www.singaporeartmuseum.sg>

Housed in the beautifully restored St. Joseph's Institution building, which began as the first Catholic school in Singapore, the museum showcases 20th-century art from Singapore and other parts of Southeast Asia. The E-mage Gallery features art on large, high-definition, visual monitors. Frequent live performances, lectures and arts-related events are held in the galleries.

Daily 10 am-7 pm (Friday until 9 pm). Tours in English Tuesday-Friday 11 am and 2 pm with additional tours Monday at 2 pm, Friday at 7 pm, Saturday and Sunday at 11 am, and 2 and 3:30 pm. S\$10 adults, S\$5 children. Free admission Friday 6-9 pm.

## Singapore Discovery Centre

510 Upper Jurong Road (take the MRT to Boon Lay station, change to SBS Bus 182 or 193)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6792-6188

<http://www.sdc.com.sg>

Not to be confused with the Science Centre, the Discovery Centre houses fascinating, kid-friendly exhibits, some permanent, others changing. It features high-tech exhibits such as virtual parachuting, a motion simulator and an interactive display showing the development of military technology. Exhibits also showcase some of Singapore's milestones and achievements. Tickets sold until one hour before closing time.

Daily except Monday 9 am-6 pm. S\$10 adults, S\$6 children.



## Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall

12 Tai Gin Road (take the train to Toa Payoh Station NS19, then take bus 139 or 145 from the interchange)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6256-7377

<http://www.sysnmh.org.sg>

Did you know that the legendary Sun Yat Sen spent time in Singapore while planning revolution in China? This heritage spot traces Dr. Sun's revolutionary efforts in Southeast Asia and shows how the Chinese community in Singapore played a key role in the 1911 Chinese Revolution, which ended monarchy in China. It is housed in a restored early-20th-century Chinese bungalow, where Dr. Sun himself stayed during some of his visits.

Daily except Monday 10 am-5 pm. S\$4 adults, S\$2 children.

## The National Art Gallery

61 Stamford Road (Stamford Court No. 04-01)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6690-9400

<http://www.nationalartgallery.sg>

Construction of the new National Art Gallery is under way, folding the former City Hall and Supreme Court buildings into its grand 646,000-sq-ft/60,000-sq-m design. Meanwhile, the curators keep busy building the city's largest collection of contemporary Southeast Asian arts, furthering the city's ambition to be considered a global arts powerhouse. Occasionally, building tours are organized for the public; check website for dates and details.

## Neighborhoods & Districts

### Chinatown

South Bridge Road (take the MRT to Chinatown, or catch SBS Bus 61, 103, 166 or 197 to South Bridge Road from the center of town)  
Singapore, Singapore

Chinatown was once the heart of the Chinese community in Singapore. In the early days, many of the townsfolk who lived there worked in the ports and godowns (warehouses) by the Singapore River. You will find several old gold shops there, still operated by Cantonese families. The most reputable are Ban Cheong and Poh Heng. You will also encounter grocers selling abalone, dried seahorses, fish, birds' nests and fruit, and you will meet calligraphers, fortune-tellers and makers of Chinese lanterns, screens, big-headed dolls and masks. Some antiques and curio shops also fill the lanes of this quarter. Indian and Muslim temples and a mosque are interspersed among the Chinese surroundings, evoking the harmonious mix of cultures that stretches back into Singapore's early history. The Sri Mariamman Temple (a Hindu temple) is open to respectful visitors of all faiths and is a most impressive structure.



## Clarke Quay

3 River Valley Road  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6337-3292. For river taxi information, phone 339-6833

<http://www.clarkequay.com.sg>

A popular food and entertainment enclave on the bank of the Singapore River. Named after the city's second governor, Sir Andrew Clarke, it is home to a number of restaurants. The 176 godowns (warehouses) and rundown shop-houses have been turned into trendy nightclubs and restaurants serving a variety of international cuisines. On Sunday, the area has a decent flea market with more than 100 stalls that sell a wide variety of antiques, trinkets and toys. Clarke Quay can be reached via river taxi from Clifford Pier and also by MRT (Clark Quay station).

It is open daily 10 am-9 pm. Pubs are open Sunday-Thursday 6 pm-1 am, till 2 am Friday and Saturday. Many offer happy hour until 6 or 8 pm. Restaurants are open till 10:30 pm.

## Geylang

Lower Geylang is home to Singapore's red-light district and presents a fascinating, grittier side of this city-state. It's also a popular supper haunt with the locals. If you stroll around Geylang at night, you will see red lanterns above specific street signs, which signify the registered red-light establishments. Farther east, you move into Geylang Serai, the traditional Malay part of town, which also has a sprawl of popular late-night dining spots. Locals like to take visitors there, and the Malay food is good and inexpensive—but keep in mind that few of the eateries are air-conditioned, and that Malay food can be quite spicy. The diminutive Malay Village is worth a quick visit if you're already in the area. Take the MRT to Paya Lebar or Aljunied for upper Geylang, Lavender or Kallang station for the seedier sections.

## Holland Village

A cosmopolitan hangout for well-heeled Singaporeans, expatriates and trendy individuals of all ages, this destination offers a stimulating mix of old and new—somewhat shabby coffee shops and hawker stalls sit cheek by jowl with ritzy wine bars, pubs and a wide range of restaurants. The main shopping complex boasts several good antiques shops specializing in furniture and other items for the home. Across from Holland Village is Chip Bee Gardens, another stretch of popular restaurants. Take SBS Buses 7, 77 and 165 from downtown or take the train to Holland Village station (CC21).

Holland Village stores are generally open daily 10 am-9 or 10 pm.

## Kampong Glam

This was the historic seat of the Malay royalty in Singapore. The main attraction today is Arab Street, the enclave where Arab merchants and traders settled in the early 1820s. Today, the walkways on both sides of this bustling street are packed with vendors selling fabrics, spices, condiments, basketry, leather and Malay clothing. Do expect to bargain. Some of the original shops and surviving *rumah panjangs* (long houses) are still there. The streets around Arab Street have been transformed into open-air cafes serving Middle Eastern fare, with *shisha* pipes burning until the wee hours of the morning. Other must-sees in this area are the old Malay cemetery and the impressive Sultan Mosque, Singapore's largest and most majestic. To get there, take the MRT to Bugis station.



## Katong

One of Singapore's first suburban residential areas, Katong was known for its hodgepodge of residents, many of whom were families of mixed-marriage heritage such as Peranakans, mixed Chinese and Malay families, and Eurasians, descended from early European settlers. The streets of Katong are lined with ornate terrace houses. From the junction of East Coast and Joo Chiat roads, you can explore shops that sell Peranakan and Eurasian foods, clothing and antiques. If you're a fan of spicy food, don't miss out on trying the famous Katong Laksa (a spicy noodle soup) found at 53 East Coast Road. To get there, take SBS Bus 14 from the Central Business District.

## Little India

The place to go for cheap and good restaurants, Hindu temples, fortune-tellers with parrots, flower-garland vendors, backroom goldsmiths, colorful sari shops and grinders of aromatic spices. The best times to visit Little India are in January or February during the Hindu Thaipusam festival, and in October or November during the Deepavali celebrations, when the entire area is decorated with lights and candles.

One highlight of walking in the Serangoon Road vicinity is Zhujiao Centre, known locally as Tekka Centre. The ground floor is a bustling open-air market for fresh foods and vegetables. There's also a food center and several shops selling clothing and trinkets at bargain prices.

The other attraction in the area is Serangoon Plaza, which houses the famous department store known as Mustafa Centre. Dubbed the Jewel of Little India, the plaza is a modern, air-conditioned complex with plenty to offer shoppers and gourmets. It's a little chaotic, but you'll find everything from exotic Indian imports and luxurious pashmina shawls to competitively priced electronics.

Visit the area on a weekday morning, when it's cooler and not so crowded. Take SBS Bus 111 from Orchard Road, or take the MRT to either Little India or Farrer Park stations.

## Mohamed Sultan Road

A stretch of restored shop-houses, this area has been transformed into one of Singapore's hippest entertainment hubs. The entire street is always pulsing with young people and loud music. The older crowd enjoys the supper clubs and more sophisticated nightspots. Take SBS Bus 143 from the Dhoby Ghaut MRT station, or catch a taxi from Orchard Road.

## Parks & Gardens

### Bukit Timah Nature Reserve

177 Hindhede Drive (take the MRT to Newton station then take SMRT Bus 171)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6468-5736

<http://www.nparks.gov.sg>

This 405-acre/164-hectare patch of forest in the central part of the island is one of the only places in the world where there is primary rain forest within a city's limits—the only other city that can claim this is Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. It's also the highest point on the island and one of the more peaceful spots in Singapore. Bird-lovers can observe squadrons of their winged friends, and there are also some resident monkeys to be seen. Clearly marked hiking trails and signposts guide the trekker; trails are designated as easy, medium and challenging.



## Chinese and Japanese Gardens

Yuan Ching Road (take the MRT to Chinese Garden station)  
Singapore, Singapore

Two beautifully landscaped parks situated side by side. Perfect locations for a picnic or a leisurely morning stroll. Don't forget to visit the Chinese teahouse.

Daily 6 am-10 pm, Saturday and Sunday until 11 pm. Free. Entrance to Bonsai Garden and Garden of Abundance costs S\$2 for adults.

## Fort Canning Park

51 Fort Canning Road (take the MRT to Dhoby Ghaut station and walk through Park Mall)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6332-1200

<http://www.nparks.gov.sg>

A hill in the center of the city, it was originally called Bukit Langaran (Forbidden Hill), possibly because of the rumors that Malay kings of the 14th century were buried there. Archaeological findings from the site are displayed at the National Museum of Singapore. Outdoor concerts are held regularly on the main grassy slope of this 44-acre/18-hectare park. Excellent for picnics, the park also affords panoramic views of the Singapore River. The ruins of Fort Canning are evident—one of its underground bunkers has been converted into the Battle Box, a war museum that tells the story of how Singapore fell to the Japanese in World War II (<http://www.legendsofthefortcanning.com/fortcanning/battlebox.htm>).

The Battle Box is open daily 10 am-6 pm. S\$8 adults.

## Gardens by the Bay

18 Marina Gardens Drive  
Singapore, Singapore

<http://www.gardensbythebay.org.sg>

Over S\$1 billion has been spent on the newest attraction at Marina Bay, the ultimate City in a Garden, which looks like something out of a science fiction movie. The Bay Garden South section features 18 striking "supertrees," which are tall constructions made of steel and concrete modeled after giant mammoth trees that are illuminated at night. An aerial walkway (S\$5 adults, S\$3 children) connects the two biggest trees. The IndoChine restaurant is located on top of the tallest tree, which is 164 ft/50 m high. Some of these trees produce electricity with solar cells. They serve as vertical gardens, but they also ventilate and irrigate the gigantic state-of-the-art conservatories housing 220,000 plants from endangered habitats. The Flower Dome has plants that grow in temperate Mediterranean and subtropical climate zones (a good place to get a respite from Singapore's tropical weather), while the Cloud Forest recreates a cool mountain forest of the tropics including an artificial cloud mountain with a 115-ft/35-m waterfall. Four Heritage Gardens features Chinese, Indian, Malay and Colonial Gardens surrounding the Supertree Grove at the northwestern corner.

The Flower Dome and the Cloud Forest are open daily 9 am-9 pm; Supertree Grove and Heritage Gardens open 5 am-2 am. Gardens are free, but admission to the two conservatories costs S\$28 adults, S\$15 children.



## MacRitchie Reservoir Park

Junction of Lornie and Thomson roads (take SBS Bus 132 or TIBS Bus 167)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6468-5736

<http://www.nparks.gov.sg>

A scenic park where monkeys and turtles reside. Also a jogging track, food kiosks, exercise stations and lush vegetation. On weekends it's often the starting point of national running events. For a look at the forest canopy, the HSBC TreeTop Walk is a freestanding suspension bridge up to 82 ft/25 m above the ground.

Daily 8:30 am-6:30 pm (the HSBC TreeTop Walk is open daily except Monday 9 am-4:30 pm). Free.

## Mount Faber

Junction of Kampong Bahru and Telok Blangah roads (take SBS Transit Service Parks 409 from HarbourFront Centre)

Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6270-8855

<http://www.mountfaber.com.sg>

One of the highest points in Singapore, Mount Faber affords a commanding view of the harbor, skyline and offshore secondary islands. It is a romantic place where you can enjoy drinks and dinner. You can also hop over to Sentosa Island via cable car from there.

Daily 7 am-7 pm. Free.

## Singapore Botanic Gardens

Cluny Road (from Orchard Boulevard take SBS Bus 7, 105, 75 or 77)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6471-7361

<http://www.sbg.org.sg>

Spread over 128 acres/52 hectares and close to the center of the city, this extensive collection of local and imported trees, shrubs and plants is augmented by special and rare collections of certain species: the National Orchid Garden, the rose garden, and the palm and bonsai garden. Try to catch a live concert outdoors at Symphony Lake, usually held on weekends.

Daily 5 am-midnight (the National Orchid Garden is open daily 8:30 am-7 pm). Free (S\$5 adult admission to the National Orchid Garden).

## Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve

301 Neo Tiew Crescent (take SMRT Bus 925 from either Woodlands, or take the MRT to Kranji station)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6794-1401

<http://www.sbwr.org.sg>

See the fabulous plants and animals of the mangroves and freshwater wetlands. Home to more than 500 species of tropical flora and fauna, the 321-acre/130-hectare conserved wetland is also a natural habitat





for birds on the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. On Saturday, meet at the visitors center for a free guided walk at 9 and 10 am, and 3 and 4 pm. No reservations are required.

Monday-Saturday 7:30 am-7 pm, Sunday and public holidays 7 am-7 pm. Free entry.

## Nightlife

The entertainment scene in Singapore is highly competitive. Clubs tend to have a short lifespan, so they try to cram as much action as possible into whatever space they have. Larger establishments have live music, dancing, food, karaoke rooms and multiple bars. In general, clubs close around 2 am Sunday-Thursday, 3 am Friday and Saturday. Sometimes the doors are closed at the official closing time, but the party carries on inside.

Nightspots are mostly concentrated on Orchard Road and its outskirts, in the Mohammed Sultan area and in the Tanjong Pagar District (south of Chinatown). Pubs within crawling distance of one another are clustered in Peranakan Place (Emerald Hill Road, just off Orchard Road opposite Specialist Shopping Center), the CHIJMES complex, the St. James Power Station, Clarke Quay and the traffic-free enclave on the riverside, Boat Quay. Locals are known to pub crawl until early morning and then settle down to breakfast in a suburban food center once the subways and buses start running again at 6 am.

## Performing Arts

The island's strong multiethnic population creates a wealth of cultural activities. For Malay performances, go to the Malay Village in Geylang, where regular traditional dramatic and dance productions are staged. Concerts by the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts Chinese Orchestra feature traditional Chinese instruments and often include folk tunes.

## Shopping

Singapore is no longer the bargain-hunter's paradise it once was, but it's still something of a treat for most consumers. The city remains an international marketplace of jewelry, sporting goods, fashion, watches, cameras, electronics, Asian artifacts and curios.

The most famous shopping district in Singapore is the Orchard Road-Somerset Road shopping belt, with major shopping centers such as Centrepoint, Ngee Ann City, Wisma Atria and Lucky Plaza. Other big shopping complexes include Suntec City and Marina Square, located just outside the Orchard area, Plaza Singapura at Dhoby Ghaut MRT station and Parco Bugis Junction at Bugis MRT station.

If you venture out to the suburbs, the prices will be lower and the ambience less touristy. The major suburban shopping centers are Tampines, Bishan, Jurong East and Yishun, which are linked on the MRT subway line from Orchard Road. The old premises of the Singapore Turf Club have been transformed into a giant shopping complex called Turf City. You can take a bus from Ang Mo Kio bus interchange or Toa Payoh bus interchange.

Peranakan antiques (blending Malay and Chinese styles) are best found along Smith Street, Pagoda Street and Temple Street in Chinatown, on Dempsey Road (a short taxi ride from the Botanic Gardens), and at the Tanglin Shopping Centre on Tanglin Road. Other places to search for Peranakan and Chinese antiques are River Valley Road, Geylang, Paya Lebar and Katong. Stock up on saris, Punjabi suits, handicrafts and gold jewelry at the Little India Arcade on Serangoon Road and the nearby Tekka Market.



Keep in mind that, although there are bargains to be had, not every purchase will be a fantastic deal. Most items can be found for less in Bangkok or Hong Kong, or even in the United States. Singapore's strength is the sheer quantity and variety of merchandise available. (Perhaps the best time to shop is during the six-week "Great Singapore Sale," generally beginning in late spring, when almost all the shops in town offer their best discounts.)

We recommend that you know exactly what big-ticket item you want before you leave home (including the model and make) and take note of what it costs at home when it's on sale. Once in Singapore, don't buy unless the item is far enough below the sale price to justify shipping or carrying it back and possibly paying import duty.

Fixed prices are the rule at department stores and at an increasing number of other outlets. Bargaining is mostly confined to smaller shops. But remember that, as a traveler, you may be at a disadvantage bargaining in these places, as you'll be viewed as having plenty of money. When bargaining in a flexible-price store, begin by asking the retailer for his "best price" and then make your counteroffer. Once you agree on a price with the shopkeeper, you're expected not to back out, so don't be hasty and make an offer unless you're serious about buying. Generally you can expect to save 10%-30% through bargaining.

The Singapore Tourist Board's free publication, *Singapore Shopping*, summarizes the atmosphere and offerings of the major shopping areas. It's advisable to shop in stores displaying the red and white Merlion sticker in their windows—this indicates they are part of the Good Retailer Scheme, supported by the Singapore tourism authorities.

Remember that international visitors can get the government sales tax refunded. Request the tax refund form from your merchant and hand it in at the airport. (Allow extra time at the airport to take care of this.) Visitors should also grab the free Tourist Tax Refund Guide, published by the Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore, which outlines the VAT refund process in greater detail.

**Shopping Hours:** Most stores and shopping centers are open daily 10 am-9:30 pm.

## Department Stores

### Mustafa Centre

320 Serangoon Road (at the corner of Syed Alwi Road)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6295-5855

<http://www.mustafa.com.sg>

A crazy maze of a department store, this place is six stories in two huge buildings connected by an overpass. You'll find all sorts of imported goods from India, from saris to sandalwood. Check out the eye-popping, elaborate gold creations in the two-story jewelry department. There's also a grocery store with shelf after shelf of boxed and tinned Indian food preparations. Just add water.

Open daily 24 hours.



## Takashimaya

Orchard Road (in the Ngee Ann City shopping complex; take the MRT to Orchard Station)  
Singapore, Singapore 238873

**Phone:** 6738-1111

<http://www.takashimaya-sin.com>

The island's largest department store is famous for its high-quality merchandise, fashions and jewelry.

Daily 10 am-9:30 pm.

## Markets

### Bugis Village

Located just outside Bugis MRT station  
Singapore, Singapore

<http://www.bugis-street.com>

This market comes as close to a *pasar malam* (night market) as you can find in modern Singapore. Shops and stalls there sell everything from CDs to clothes to handheld computer games and toys. Expect loud music and hawkers touting their wares, as well as a good selection of food stalls selling traditional snacks such as dragon-beard candy and hot buns. Things really come to life between 7 pm and midnight, though the action spins all day long.

### Kreta Ayer Wet Market

Kreta Ayer and Keong Siak roads (from North Bridge Road take SBS Bus 61, 103, 166 or 197)  
Singapore, Singapore

Named after the carts that used to deliver water (the water station was nearby), this Chinatown market sells exotic fresh meat, fish and produce. Arrive early (6 am or earlier) to watch local housewives bargain for such freshly prepared meats as turtles, frogs, black-skinned chicken and eels. A huge food center above the market offers local breakfast cuisine before or after your market tour.

## MAAD

28 Maxwell Road (inside the Red Dot Design Museum; take the MRT to Tanjong Pagar station)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6534-7194

<http://www.maad.sg>

Market for Artists and Designers is a monthly Sunday market in Tanjong Pagar for original artwork, jewelry, clothing and other handicrafts in Tanjong Pagar. A relatively recent addition to the Singapore cultural scene, MAAD draws an eclectic mix of creative types and their prospective supporters.

5 pm-midnight. Free.



## Public Garden

Singapore, Singapore

<http://www.public-garden.com>

Here is where you'll find the bohemian, creative souls in Singapore peddling their handmade wares—from vintage clothes and cute little trinkets to colorful ceramics and homemade baked goodies. Held twice monthly at various locations; check website for details.

<http://www.public-garden.com>.

## Shopping Areas

### Centrepoint

176 Orchard St. (near the Somerset MRT station)

Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6237-9000

<http://www.fraserscentrepoinmalls.com/malls/cp/index.asp>

Located in the heart of Orchard Road, this is one of the most popular shopping centers among locals and tourists alike. Stores specialize in clothing, sporting goods and electronic equipment, and the center also is home to the flagship store of Robinsons & Co. Well-regarded by many for its quality goods and services, Robinsons & Co. attracts more shoppers during its sale season than any other department store.

Daily 10 am-10 pm.

### ION Orchard

2 Orchard Turn

Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6238-8228

<http://www.ionorchard.com>

In Singapore, this is the shopping mall of all shopping malls, spanning over 640,000 sq ft/59,460 sq m and eight floors of shops and restaurants. It's the first mall you'd see upon exiting Orchard MRT station, and has a good variety of mid- to high-end labels. Its circular, shimmering facade has become the highlight of Orchard Road. If there is just one shopping center to visit in Singapore, this would be it.

Daily 10 am-10 pm.

### Raffles Hotel Shopping Arcade

Beach Road (behind the Raffles Hotel)

Singapore, Singapore

<http://www.raffles.com/singapore/guest-services/arcade/arcade>

This is the place to go if you're in the mood for brandishing that credit card and picking up quality goods. Otherwise, steer clear: Only top international brands or fine but costly local goods are sold there. The Raffles Hotel charm makes it a worthwhile shopping—or browsing—experience that's different from the glitzy, modern malls of Orchard Road. Even the hotel souvenirs are a delight.



## Sim Lim Square

1 Rochor Canal Road (take the MRT to Bugis station or Little India)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6338-3859

<http://www.simlimsquare.com.sg>

Floor after floor of shops selling the latest deals in electronics and computers. Some excellent bargains can be had, but make sure you haggle and check all warranties to make sure they're in effect internationally.

Daily 10:30 am-9 pm.

## Singapore Handicraft Centre

Chinatown Point, 133 New Bridge Road (take the MRT to Chinatown station)  
Singapore, Singapore

Lots of imported Chinese goodies in a number of small shops. Calligraphy scrolls, carved stamps, porcelain, wood carvings and jade all make great gifts and souvenirs. Also cosmetics, perfumes and other beauty products for sale.

Most shops open daily 10 am-6 pm.

## Suntec City Mall

Raffles Boulevard and Nicoll Highway (opposite the Marina Mandarin Hotel; main entrance is on 3 Temasek Boulevard)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6825-2669

<http://www.sunteccity.com.sg>

This mall is so big, there are buggies to take people from one end to the other (it takes 20 minutes to walk). Includes retail shops, entertainment centers, a megamarket (the massive Carrefour) and Fountain Court, where dozens of food outlets and restaurants surround what's billed as the world's largest fountain.

Open daily 10 am-10 pm.

## Tanglin Shopping Centre

19 Tanglin Road (between St. Regis and Orchard Parade hotels)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6877-1818

<http://www.tanglinsc.com>

For some reason, a lot of antiques, Asian carpet and art shops have gathered in this one shopping center, which makes for excellent browsing through old curio items from China, Myanmar, India, Indonesia and beyond.

Most shops are open Monday-Saturday 10 am-6 pm.



## Specialty Stores

### Ashley Isham

01-27 Orchard Central  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6509-5408

<http://www.ashleyisham.com>

Ashley Isham, currently based in London, is one of Singapore's most famous and successful fashion designers. Angelina Jolie, Christina Aguilera and Zara Philips are only three of his most distinguished clients who swear by his stylish, flamboyant and elegant creations. Mere mortals should check out his less pricey "diffusion line."

Daily 10 am-8 pm.

### Atelier Ong Shunmugam

16 Raffles Quay, B1-36, Hong Leong Building  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6223-4804

<http://ongshunmugam.com>

If you want to get clothes by one of Singapore's hottest fashion designers, Priscilla Shunmugam, then this is the place to go for both ready-to-wear pieces or made-to-measure clothes. Ong Shunmugam, her womenswear label, is inspired by Asian heritage, and her thoughtful reinterpretation of tradition results in fashion that is feminine and romantic, yet cutting edge. Her cheongsams are especially delightful and pretty. For ready-to-wear purchases, walk-ins are accepted, but bespoke orders are by appointment only.

Monday-Friday noon-7 pm.

### Eu Yan Sang Medical Hall

269A South Bridge Road  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6225-3211

<http://www.euyansang.com>

The oldest and best-known Chinese medical hall in town sells herbs and other traditional essences, teas, and roots said to cure just about anything. Most remedies come with English instruction, or opt for a friendly consultation given by a specialist for a flat fee of S\$12.

Monday-Saturday 8:30 am-6 pm.

### Rumah Bebe

113 East Coast Road  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6247-8781

<http://www.rumahbebe.com>



Housed in a beautifully restored old Peranakan shop house from 1928 in Katong, this shop offers a very charming collection of arts and crafts produced in Malay-Chinese Peranakan style: colorful embroideries, beadworks, batik-textiles, jewelry and porcelain. You can watch beading demonstrations by Bebe Seet, the doyenne of Peranakan beadwork in Singapore.

Daily except Monday 9:30 am-6:30 pm.

### **Sia Huat**

20 Pandan Road  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6268-3922

<http://www.siahuat.com>

Even those who can't cook will find themselves yearning for the shiny industrial and domestic culinary appliances at this chef's dream of an emporium in central Chinatown. Watch the door—it seems no one leaves without at least some small purchase sure to keep them at home for their next meal.

Monday-Saturday 8:30 am-6:15 pm. Showroom by appointment only.

### **Soon Lee**

73 Haji Lane  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6297-0198

<http://soonlee.sg>

A feel-good shop selling all things girly, including blouses, bags, books, homeware, cardigans and jewelry. It carries products by local designers, along with some indie fashion brands from Hong Kong, Korea, the Phillipines and the U.K.

Daily noon-9 pm.

### **The John Erdos Gallery**

274 River Valley Road  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6735-3307

<http://www.johnerdos.com.sg>

This upmarket operation sells furniture, gifts and accessories.

Daily 10:30 am-6:30 pm.

### **Victor York**

40B Boat Quay  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6220-5908

<http://www.victoryork.com>



Tailors can be very hit-or-miss around Asia, with more uneven sleeves than perfect fits. At Victor York, European fabrics and speedy service take Singapore tailoring up a notch. It will even send a tailor to your hotel room for measurements and delivery.

Monday-Friday 9:30 am-6:30 pm, Saturday 11 am-4 pm.

## Dining

### Dining Overview

Singapore has a well-deserved reputation for satisfying the most discerning gourmet. Cuisines range from spicy Indian curries and tantalizing Chinese fare to Nyonya (a combination of Chinese and Malay) delicacies, as well as the finest in French and Italian cooking.

However, restaurants in Singapore open and close with amazing rapidity, and key staff, responsible for a restaurant's success, job-hop with similar speed. New and exciting establishments pop up everywhere, in everything from restored shops to godowns (warehouses). Club Street, in the Tanjong Pagar district, offers a host of upscale restaurants and bistro-type establishments. Or try visiting one of Singapore's neighborhood food centers—bazaars with stalls offering Indian, Chinese, Indonesian and Malaysian food, all at very low prices.

You get the best value at the hawker centers, which are either open-air, with a common area for diners, or air-conditioned food courts occupying the basement or the top level of shopping centers. For a glimpse of Chinatown's colorful past, visit the stretch of Smith Street known as "Food Street," where you'll find a long row of stalls offering a broad palette of local and other Asian hawker favorites. Popular with both locals and tourists, the streetside tables along Smith Street are usually packed during prime evening hours.

Two stretches along the Singapore River—Boat Quay and Clarke Quay—offer more than 35 alfresco and indoor establishments serving diverse cuisines. Boat Quay is the preferred destination for local workers from the financial district after they escape their offices. Expect aggressive hawking as you stroll along Boat Quay, which has even more dining places than does Clarke. (Best refusal: "Sorry, I've just eaten.")

General dining times are 7-10 am for breakfast, 11:30 am-2:30 pm for lunch and 7-10 pm for dinner. Most food outlets stop serving dinner by 10 pm, although some hotel coffeehouses and many stalls at certain hawker centers are open throughout the night. Reservations are generally not required at most restaurants but are recommended for large groups, on weekends and some public holidays.

Expect to pay within these general guidelines, based on the cost of dinner for one, not including drinks, tax or tip: \$ = less than S\$15; \$\$ = S\$15-\$30; \$\$\$ = S\$31-\$75; and \$\$\$\$ = more than S\$75.

### Local & Regional

#### Blue Ginger

97 Tanjong Pagar Road  
Singapore, Singapore

Serves up traditional Nonya fare such as *sambal* chili prawn and *otak otak* (fish grilled in banana leaves). Order plenty to drink because the chili factor can shock foreign taste buds. However, there are several





items on the menu for the chili-intolerant: The steamed sea bass, *tahu* (bean curd) and grilled boneless chicken marinated with coconut milk and spices are all relatively mild.

Daily for lunch and dinner. Reservations recommended on weekends. \$\$\$ . Most major credit cards.

## Chinatown Food Street (Smith Street)

Singapore, Singapore

<http://www.chinatown.sg/index.php?fx=directory&g1=category&g2=2&g3=17&m=map>

Whether you're hungry for noodles, dumplings, rice or an entire fried fish, few places are as ambient—or economical—as Chinatown's Smith Street. Just order a la carte from any hawker cart and then take your tray to one of the tables in the street. (Don't worry, it's a pedestrian-only zone). We recommend the *kway teow*, a Singaporean classic of stir-fried noodles with cockles, scrambled eggs and chopped Chinese chives that, while originally created by poor Chinese fishermen in Singapore's early days, retains its popularity on the hawker stall circuit.

Most stalls open daily for dinner. \$.

## Lagoon Hawker Centre

East Coast Lagoon Hawker Center  
Singapore, Singapore

The best hawker-center setting in all of Singapore: a relaxed, spacious area looking out over the sea. Among the local favorites, you'll find the best selection of *satay* in town at stall 17.

Daily except Tuesday for dinner, closed some Mondays. \$. No credit cards.

## Lau Pa Sat Festival Market

18 Raffles Quay (between Robinson Road and Shenton Way)  
Singapore, Singapore

A huge food center without air-conditioning, it sells mainly local specialties augmented by Japanese and Korean cuisine. At night, Boon Tat Street, a road fronting the food center, is closed off and transformed into a lively dining area.

Open 24 hours daily. \$. No credit cards.

## Makansutra Gluttons Bay

01-15 Esplanade Mall (along the edge of the Esplanade theater complex on Raffles Avenue)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6438-4038

<http://www.makansutra.com>

The concept is simple: a collection of Singapore's best hawkers without the maddening din. Instead, 12 stalls with outdoor seating for 500 line the Singapore riverfront. Signs in English, Chinese and Japanese give information about the vendors and the food served. Dine on affordable street eats such as *char siew baw* (stuffed pork buns), Indonesian-style *satay*, *mee goreng*, five-spice prawn fritters and Heng Heng's famous fried carrot cake. For those who want an unusual splurge, spend S\$50 or more on favorites among the various stalls, then settle down for an eight- to 10-course dinner with full waiter service.



Nightly for dinner (till 3 am on weekends). \$-\$\$\$. No credit cards.

## Maxwell Road Hawker Centre

1 Kadayanallur St. (Maxwell Food Centre)  
Singapore, Singapore

This extremely popular, densely packed hawker center in Chinatown with more than 100 food stalls across three rows is a Singapore institution. Before you hit the stalls, reserve a seat by leaving a box of paper tissues. A favorite food stall is Tian Tian Hainanese Chicken Rice (Stall 10; daily except Monday 11 am-8 pm). The fragrant rice is cooked in chicken broth, served with succulent chicken meat and tastes absolutely fabulous. The impressive queue at noon (handled very efficiently by the vendors) doesn't lie. Another recommended stall is Senat Issan Thai (Stall 85). Try the spicy green Thai curry for S\$5; it may be the best you will find in Singapore, and the cheapest, too. Other stalls sell exotic Chinese fare difficult to find in other food centers. Also recommended are 75 Peanuts Soup (Stall 57) and China Street Fritters (Stall 64), while lovers of noodle soup (with fish) should head straight to Jin Hua Sliced Fish Bee Hoon (Stall 77). Usually you won't pay more than S\$10 to fill up.

Most stalls are open daily for lunch and dinner. Some are closed on Monday, Tuesday, or on weekends. \$. No credit cards.

## Newton Circus

Newton Circus (near Newton MTR)  
Singapore, Singapore

Newton Circus caters to tourists, with higher prices than other hawker centers. Although this place serves mostly traditional street food, we recommend its seafood dishes such as grilled prawns, grilled stingray with hot *sambal* (chili peppers combined with coconut or other ingredients), shellfish and *roti pratha* (fried Indian bread with curry), especially after a round of late-night clubbing. A word of warning—order all seafood very carefully. If you're not specific, you'll be given the most expensive catch, which will be charged by weight. Said to be a favorite of Hong Kong movie star Chow Yun-Fat, who eats there whenever he is in town.

Nightly for dinner until 4 am. \$-\$\$\$. No credit cards.

## Straits Kitchen

10 Scotts Road (Grand Hyatt Hotel)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6732-1234

<http://www.singapore.grand.hyattrestaurants.com/straitskitchen>

Very popular stylish restaurant in the Grand Hyatt hotel designed like a very upmarket hawker food court. There you can sample all the culinary favorites of Singapore: Indian, Chinese, Malay and Indonesian dishes all prepared before your eyes, at fixed buffet prices. Try black-pepper crab or roasted duck, but leave room for the Peranakan desserts such as the homemade durian ice cream. Service and quality are both excellent, but stay away from the overpriced wines and stick to the delicious fresh juices.

Daily for lunch and dinner. Reservations recommended. \$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.



## Ya Kun Kaya Toast

Multiple locations, including on Orchard Road in Takashimaya/Ngee Ann City Shopping Centre, Scotts Road in Far East Plaza, Sunte  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6222-4567

<http://www.yakun.com>

Since 1944, this local chain has been a favorite breakfast haunt for its grilled bread slices spread generously with *kaya*, a deliciously creamy mixture of coconut and egg infused with fragrant pandan leaves. Enjoy your toast by dipping it in soft-boiled egg with soy sauce, and have it with a cup of local coffee (known as *kopi*) or tea (*teh*).

Daily for breakfast and lunch. \$. No credit cards.

## Cuisines

### Asian

### Akashi

19 Tanglin Road No. B1-9/10/11 (Tanglin Shopping Centre)  
Singapore, Singapore

The restaurant chain is reasonably priced, and the fish is fresh from the sea. The menu at these casual sushi spots is a standout for taste and value. Lunchtime draws office workers to its three bustling Central Business District locations, but dinner is a quieter affair. Expect to see visiting Japanese businesspeople and tourists laden with the day's purchases sit down to platters full of perfectly sliced pieces of raw fish and traditional Japanese cooked fare.

Daily for lunch and dinner. \$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

## Banana Leaf Apolo

54-56 Race Course Road  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6293-8682

<https://www.facebook.com/TheBananaLeafApolo>

Arguably the top eatery in Little India, the two branches of this restaurant sit close together, one specializing in South Indian (largely vegetarian), the other North Indian (milder, with more chicken, mutton and seafood dishes). Curry dishes are served on banana leaves, and you eat with your right hand (the left is considered impure). Try the fish head curry and the spicy chili prawns. Inexpensive set lunch meals available, too.

Daily for lunch and dinner. \$\$\$. Most major credit cards.



## Hai Tien Lo

7 Raffles Blvd.  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6826-8240

[http://www.panpacific.com/en/singapore/restaurants\\_bars/Hai\\_Tien\\_Lo.html](http://www.panpacific.com/en/singapore/restaurants_bars/Hai_Tien_Lo.html)

Considered by many to be the best Cantonese restaurant in Singapore, it has a menu with prices to match that reputation. Menu specials change with the seasons, but you can always count on perennial favorites such as Peking duck, barbecue suckling pig and house specialties, including baked codfish in champagne sauce or handmade spinach tofu. A wonderful experience in terms of food, service and ambience, and it's located on the 37th floor of the Pan Pacific Hotel with panoramic views of the city.

Daily for lunch and dinner. Saturday and Sunday a la carte buffet brunch 11:30 am-2:30 pm. Weekend reservations recommended (ask for a table near the window). \$\$\$\$ . Most major credit cards.

## Makan Dulu

865 Mountbatten Road (Katong Shopping Center)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6334-1012

<http://www.sundanesefood.com>

A satisfying taste of Indonesian cuisine in a casual setting with popular and traditional Indonesian music. Specialties include a range of charcoal-grilled dishes.

Daily for lunch and dinner. \$\$ . Most major credit cards.

## Rang Mahal

Pan Pacific Hotel, Level 3, 7 Raffles Blvd.  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6333-1788

<http://www.rangmahal.com.sg>

Singapore's premier Indian restaurant. A stunningly elegant design serves as backdrop for truly excellent classical Indian cuisine. *Rogan josh* (lamb curry), *tandoori kumbh* (stuffed portobello mushroom) and stuffed prawns are some of the highlights. Sister locations in Hard Rock Hotel and Stadium Waterfront.

Sunday-Friday for lunch and dinner, Saturday for dinner only. \$\$\$\$ . Most major credit cards.

## Shinji by Kanesaka

1 Beach Road (in the Raffles Hotel)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6338-6131

<http://www.shinjibykanesaka.com/raffles>

Singapore's best Japanese restaurant (and maybe one of the best outside of Japan), takes up a quiet hidden space in the famous Raffles Hotel. The main sushi counter is carved from a very old Japanese cypress tree. Sushi is simply spectacular there: Only the finest cuts of raw fish are served (in traditional



Edomae style), and rice of the very best quality is prepared and cooked to perfection. If you want to splurge, order the Omakase dinner, which consists of sashimi, cooked food and sushi.

Monday-Saturday for lunch and dinner. Reservations highly recommended. \$\$\$\$.

## Shiraishi

7 Raffles Ave. (in the Ritz-Carlton Millenia Hotel)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6338-3788

<http://www.ritzcarlton.com/en/Properties/Singapore/Dining/shiraishi>

Singapore's best raw fish bites can be had at this chic sliver of a restaurant inside the Ritz-Carlton Millenia Hotel. Seats at the sushi bar fill up early with homesick Japanese and discerning locals willing to pay for premium cuts of the freshest fish, flown in daily from Japan.

\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

## Silk Road

165 Tanjong Pagar Road (Amara Hotel, Level 2)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6227-3848

<http://www.silkroadrestaurants.com>

The glass-floor entrance, embedded with verses from a famous Chinese poem, is just the beginning of a beautiful dining experience. The kitchen offers cuisine from all major stops along the Chinese stretch of the historic Silk Road. You may find something mild there, but the specialties are the spicy items of the Chinese southwest. The kung pao chicken and braised eggplant in a torrid sauce are great, and don't miss the house-made shaved noodles. There also are nice, light desserts to cool the fires.

Open daily for lunch and dinner. \$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

## Summer Pavilion Restaurant

7 Raffles Ave. (in the Ritz-Carlton Millenia Hotel)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6434-5286

<http://www.ritzcarlton.com/en/Properties/Singapore/Dining/SummerPavilion>

This is a don't-miss dining experience. The style is light Cantonese. Especially recommended are the duck slices with mango as a starter, followed by steamed prawns with garlic, the rack of lamb in black-bean sauce and any of the exquisite desserts.

Open daily for lunch and dinner. \$\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.



## Tatsu Sushi

30 Victoria St. (No. 01-16 Block F, CHIJMES)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6332-5868

<http://www.tatusushi.com.sg>

A popular spot with both the working Singaporean lunch crowd and Japanese executives at night. Try the fresh *bento* set lunches, which include succulent sashimi and sushi. All ingredients are imported directly from Tokyo's Tsuji Market. For dinner, you can either order a la carte or ask them to plan a dinner menu for you.

Daily for lunch and dinner. Reservations recommended. \$\$-\$\$\$ . Most major credit cards.

## Fusion

### Buko Nero

126 Tanjong Pagar Road  
Singapore, Singapore

The name may be Italian for "hole in the wall," but this tiny dining secret boasts the 20 most sought-after seats in Singapore, thanks to the delicious Italian and Asian dishes from a husband-and-wife chef duo. Book at least one month ahead and let your mouth start watering for signature dishes such as Tau Kwa Tower, pan-fried bean curd topped with veggies and sauced with *kecap manis*, or the inventive polenta-crusted trout served with cherry tomatoes in a seafood bisque reduction sauce. Save room for dessert.

\$\$\$ . Most major credit cards.

## The Rice Table

360 Orchard Road, No. 02-09 (International Building)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6835-3783

<http://www.ricetable.com.sg>

One of the few places in town that serves *rijsttafel*, a traditional fusion of Dutch and Indonesian tastes served in numerous small courses brought to your table. Pay one price and savor up to 20 dishes in portions small enough for a juicy bite of each—it's a fabulous way to try many dishes without committing yourself to a whole plateful. The restaurant is decorated with shadow puppets, face masks and carvings to give it an Indonesian feel. Great for large groups and festive occasions.

Open daily for lunch and dinner. Reservations recommended. \$\$ . Most major credit cards.

## Tippling Club

38 Tanjong Pagar Road  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6475-2217

<http://www.tipplingclub.com>

Another chef in Singapore with rave reviews is Briton Ryan Clift, who makes it a point to weave in local food influences with his inventive gastronomic concoctions. The cocktails are just as colorful, and despite



how many some of the dishes might seem (think deconstructed chicken curry and Styrofoam truffle), they are always accessible and delicious.

Monday-Friday for lunch and dinner, Saturday for dinner only. \$\$\$\$.

## Italian

### Da Paolo

80 Club St.  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6224-7081

<http://www.dapaolo.com.sg>

One of the first hip little eateries to open in an old Chinese shop-house, this authentic Italian place is still a hot spot. The ground floor offers elegant, intimate dining—or head upstairs for a romantic retreat with sunlight streaming through the tall windows. Sink your teeth into the succulent buffalo mozzarella salad, then indulge in house-made seafood pasta or the fettuccine *vegetale*.

Monday-Saturday for lunch and dinner. \$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

### Michelangelo's

Chip Bee Gardens, Block 44, No. 01-60, Jalan Merah Saga (opposite Holland Village)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6475-9069

<http://www.michelangelos.com.sg>

This cozy restaurant remains a favorite, even though it faces stiff competition. Named after its owner, Michelangelo's serves hearty portions of pasta and tantalizing sauces. Try the squid-ink or vodka cream pasta, which are light and flavorful. The fish dishes are also quite good. If nothing on the menu interests you, the chef will prepare a special dish to order.

Daily for dinner. Reservations required on weekends. \$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

### Pizzeria Mozza

10 Bayfront Ave. (The Shoppes at Marina Bay Sands)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6688-8522

<http://www.osteriamozza.com/singapore>

The restaurants at the Marina Bay Sands are usually pricey, but co-owner and pizza superstar Mario Batali from New York and Filipina executive chef Karla Mendoza make sure that the wood-fired crispy pizzas are not only the best you will find in Singapore, but they won't break the bank either. Do try the antipasti and the pasta dishes, too. The next-door Osteria Mozza is a more refined affair.

Daily for lunch and dinner. Reservations recommended. \$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.



## Seafood

### East Coast Seafood Centre

East Coast Parkway (halfway to the airport)  
Singapore, Singapore

<http://www.longbeachseafood.com.sg>

You can get good seafood almost everywhere in Singapore, but this is a seafood-eater's paradise, offering a huge selection of regional seafood dishes. There are eight restaurants there, the most popular ones being No Signboard Seafood and Long Beach Seafood. If you are new to seafood, start with the black pepper crab, steamed sea bass, drunken prawns and hot buns. Chili crab is the specialty at most eateries there.

Daily for dinner beginning at 5 pm. Reservations recommended on the weekend to avoid a long wait. \$\$\$. No credit cards.

## Steak Houses

### CUT by Wolfgang Puck

10 Bayfront Ave. (The Shoppes at Marina Bay Sands; B1-71, next to the Theater)  
Singapore, Singapore

**Phone:** 6688-8517

<http://www.wolfgangpuck.com/restaurants/fine-dining/61447>

Wolfgang Puck's modern, beautifully designed steak house at Marina Bay Sands is a true paradise for meat lovers. The selection of juicy, tender premium steaks is pricey, but do try Puck's signature Kobe beef short ribs, aged USDA Prime Illinois corn-fed rib eye, dry-aged Australian Angus from Rangers Valley, double thick Iberico pork chop or the Colorado lamb chops. Seafood lovers should order the pan-roasted Maine lobster with black truffle sabayon. The wine list is also impressive.

Daily for dinner only. Reservations highly recommended. \$\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

## Security

### Etiquette

English is taught in schools, so many people, including most taxi drivers, speak and understand the language. You will hear plenty of Singlish, though—a truly indigenous blend of English and various local dialects that has an engaging ring to it. Don't be surprised if you hear the taxi driver say "OK lah?" (*lah* is often added at the end of a phrase). Certain shorthand phrases of English have also worked their way into the mainstream dialect: Your sales assistant may say "Can or not?" during your fitting, wondering simply if the item meets with your approval.

Businesspeople in Singapore expect the people they're dealing with to be fairly punctual for meetings and dinners. Upon meeting, they give and receive business cards with both hands after the handshake. (Admire the card for a few moments before placing it on the table in front of you to help you remember the person's name.) Meetings might take place anywhere—in boardrooms, restaurants and even on golf courses. Because of the humid tropical heat, businesspeople seldom wear suits (although if you are in development, finance or sales, we recommend wearing one). Most wear casual clothes, though men





usually wear ties. Slacks and pantsuits are fine for women. Modesty is more important than formality. Do not be put off if your business associate in Singapore prefers to communicate via e-mail or text message; they are the de facto platforms of communication, given that 87% of Singapore's population are smartphone users. Likewise, do not be offended if people are checking their phones during business meetings or networking sessions, even if they are having a conversation with you. It is part of the prevalent multitasking culture.

The service culture is not strong, so lower your expectations in retail shops and hotels when it comes to customer service. The upside is that efficiency is valued in this society, so most of the time, you will get what you ask for, but perhaps not in the most courteous and friendly of ways.

If you are unsure about customs—for example, what to wear to a wedding or what sort of gift to give for any occasion—consult your hotel's concierge. Some local customs are contrary to Western ideas, and it's best to be on the safe side. Clocks and knives, for example, are considered inappropriate gifts in the Chinese tradition.

## **Personal Safety**

Singapore has earned the distinction of being one of the most crime-free countries in the world. The streets are quite safe at all times of the day and usually at night. Many are patrolled by hidden police cameras. Still, pickpockets and purse snatchers occasionally prey on unsuspecting victims, particularly in hawker centers, food courts and shopping centers. It's wise to avoid dark and secluded streets, particularly in the lower Geylang area, and especially if you're alone.

Try to keep your bag or purse zipped up at all times and close by your side. Similarly, be wary in crowded areas, as terrorists have been known to target Westerners and Americans, and avoid all public demonstrations, which are illegal in Singapore and may lead to fines or worse for participants.

For police, dial 999, or for the police hotline, dial 6225-0000. For ambulance services, dial 995.

For more information, contact your country's travel-advisory agency.

## **Health**

The authorities have stringent standards for water treatment, so tap water is safe to drink anywhere on the island. Still, travelers may want to err on the side of caution and drink bottled water, which is available in all supermarkets and restaurants. Food sold on the streets and in food outlets is equally safe, as long as it has been freshly cooked.

All food outlets are issued a hygiene rating by the Environment Ministry, ranging from an A to a D (you're safest staying with A- and B-rated establishments). Rating certificates are prominently displayed, usually at the entrance of a restaurant or on the front of a food stall. But do be careful when eating seafood (especially dishes that use raw fish, cockles or oysters).

Recent years have seen a rise in dengue fever, a virus spread through a bite from an Aedes mosquito. Once infected, the victim experiences high fever and rash, which, if left untreated, can lead to internal bleeding and shock. If you're spending a lot of time outdoors, it is advisable to apply mosquito repellent along with sunscreen.



Avian influenza, or bird flu, does not pose a problem for the average visitor to Singapore, and all attractions that feature birds have taken very stringent precautions to protect their species from infection.

Food- and waterborne illnesses usually lead to vomiting and diarrhea. We recommend taking along a diarrhea medicine to treat mild cases yourself.

All general physicians speak English, and clinics are registered with the Singapore Medical Association, a government-appointed agency. You can receive emergency care at hospitals 24 hours a day. A centrally located private hospital with excellent international healthcare standards, Mount Elizabeth Hospital, is located just off Orchard Road at 3 Mount Elizabeth (phone 6737-2666). For Accidents and Emergency at Mount Elizabeth, call 6731-2218 or 6731-2219; for an ambulance, call 6473-2222.  
<http://www.hospitals.sg/hospital/mount-elizabeth-hospital>.

Major hotels have in-house doctors.

For more information, contact your country's health-advisory agency.

## **Disabled Advisory**

Singapore's major shopping sidewalks and train stations are smooth, except in areas under construction and the narrow, jumbled lanes of Chinatown. Museums are ramped for disabled visitors and most shopping malls have disabled access.

SBS Transit has a fleet of 172 wheelchair-accessible buses (WABs) that can accommodate up to two wheelchairs. To find out which bus routes offer this service, please visit [http://www.sbstransit.com.sg/doyouknow/facts\\_wab.aspx](http://www.sbstransit.com.sg/doyouknow/facts_wab.aspx)

For information on accessibility, contact the National Council of Social Services (NCSS), which maintains a website full of excellent and up-to-date information for disabled travelers not just to Singapore, but also to other major destinations around the world. The NCSS (25 International Business Park, No. 04-77 German Centre, Singapore; phone 6899-1220) publishes a handicapped-access map called Access Singapore. Download it online at <http://www.dpa.org.sg>.

## **Facts**

### **Dos & Don'ts**

Do call for a taxi booking if you're at an outlying area or stranded during rush hour. It can save lots of hassle with little additional cost.

Don't put anyone's business card into your pocket immediately upon receiving it. Take a second to read it, perhaps comment about it and keep it visible for a bit before stowing it. It's a sign of respect.

Do feel free to mingle with your Singaporean hosts. Because most locals speak English, it's easier to make friends in Singapore than it is in many other foreign countries.

Do speak a little slower than usual though to ensure you're being understood. There's a tendency for many Singaporeans to nod even if they don't understand what you're saying. And if your accent is different from the Singaporean accent, it is likely that some words may get garbled along the way.



Do visit a mosque. In multicultural Singapore, these beautiful buildings are open for anyone to view; just be sure to dress modestly (which means women shouldn't bare shoulders or knees) and, if you are not Muslim, respect areas reserved for Muslims.

Don't jaywalk, litter (especially chewing gum), smoke in public areas, forget to flush a public toilet or stand near your hotel window immodestly. If you are seen in a state of undress it is considered pornography, and you will be charged with breaking the law, even though it might seem from a Western perspective that the viewer is a Peeping Tom. In fact, to report you is a civic duty.

Do take off your shoes when entering a temple, mosque and some shops—and do the same when entering a person's home.

Don't point with one finger when trying to get someone's attention, as this is seen as rude. Rather, wave your hand if you need to attract someone's attention.

Don't feel offended if passersby don't respond if you smile or greet them. People in Singapore are generally somewhat shy. However, if you initiate a conversation about what to do in Singapore, most will enthusiastically recommend their favorite spots.

Do be adventurous in trying local food if you don't have any food allergies. It's a good way to experience local life through the multicultural offerings such as chili crab, chicken rice, and rojak (a salad with prawn paste sauce). Singaporeans get particularly excited when foreign friends are game enough to partake of the country's favorite fruit, the durian: a green, thorny fruit with yellow, custardy flesh inside and a pungent smell that has been described as resembling sewage or ripe cheese.

## Geostats

**Passport/Visa Requirements:** Citizens of Canada and the U.S. need a passport with at least six months' validity, proof of onward passage and sufficient funds for the length of their stay. Visas are not required. Reconfirm travel document requirements with your carrier prior to departure.

**Population:** 5,187,930.

**Languages:** The national language is Malay, and English is the official government administrative language. The official languages are Chinese, Malay, English and Tamil. English is understood and widely used.

**Predominant Religions:** Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Islamic, Taoist.

**Time Zone:** 8 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (+8 GMT). Daylight Saving Time is not observed.

**Voltage Requirements:** 220 volts.

**Telephone Codes:** 65, country code;



## Money

### Currency Exchange

The local currency is Singapore dollars (S\$2, S\$5, S\$10, S\$50, S\$100, S\$500, S\$1,000 and S\$10,000—the world's most valuable banknote) and cents (S\$0.01, S\$0.05, S\$0.10, S\$0.20, S\$0.50 and S\$1 coins). It is one of the most stable currencies in Southeast Asia.

Traveler's checks and foreign currencies can be changed at most banks and licensed money changers. Authorized money changers offer more competitive rates than banks, but because rates vary only slightly, for small amounts there is little difference between the two. Money changers are found throughout the shopping and business districts as well as the Departure Check-in Hall, Arrival Hall and Departure/Transit Lounge at the airport. You'll get the best rates in the Orchard Road, Raffles City and Chinatown areas; your hotel will likely give you the worst rates.

ATMs are available at major shopping centers and business districts as well as at the airport's Terminals 1 and 2. Be aware that, in Singapore, ATMs do not give the best rates. If you find yourself in need of quick cash, however, ATMs do accept Visa and MasterCard as well as cards for the Cirrus, Plus and Star networks.

The banks in Singapore include DBS Singapore, United Overseas Bank (UOB), Citibank, Standard Chartered Bank, HSBC Bank and OCBC Bank. Banking hours are generally Monday-Friday 9:30 am-3 pm, Saturday 9-11:30 am. Some banks may have extended hours.

### Taxes

The 7% Goods and Services Tax (GST) is refundable. This tax applies to all goods that have been imported into Singapore for sale. If you are not a resident, you qualify for a refund provided you spend a minimum of S\$100 on goods displaying the tax-refund logo and take the goods out of the country within two months of purchase.

After making purchases, ask for a GST shopping check (have your passport with you to verify your eligibility for a refund). Before you check your bags at the airport, customs officials will verify your goods and stamp your check. Then take the check to the Asia Tax Free Shopping refund counter for an immediate refund. Grab a *How to Shop Tax-Free in Singapore* pamphlet at the airport or any visitor center for more information.

### Tipping

Tipping is not required in Singapore and is somewhat discouraged in hotels and restaurants where there is a 10% service charge. You may, however, tip when the bill does not include a service charge or when you feel the service has been exceptional. Many people simply round up the total on the bill and leave the difference as a tip. No tips are paid to taxi drivers, who may even try to return the funds.

### Weather

Like most of Southeast Asia, Singapore is generally hot and humid. Average temperatures hover around 86 F/30 C and seldom dip below 75 F/22 C. November and December is the rainy season. June-August is considered to be the best time to visit, but even then it rains often. Don't let the climate stop you from visiting, however. Most buildings are air-conditioned (to the point that you may want to take a sweater),



and pains have been taken to make everything as comfortable as can be, all things considered. When it does rain, it's generally only for a short period.

## What to Wear

In such a cosmopolitan and multicultural city, diversity is the operative word when it comes to styles of dress. Wearing outfits common to any of the four main cultural groups is acceptable almost any time of the day, anywhere and for whatever occasion. However, as the weather in Singapore is warm and humid most of the time, light summer clothing (especially natural fibers) is recommended. The sunlight can be harsh, so wearing a cap or hat will help to prevent sunburn.

People in Singapore generally dress casually if they're not at work. Wearing a T-shirt with jeans or Bermuda shorts is common, and most people are open to wearing sandals or slippers on their days off. For sightseeing, it's best to avoid wearing shorts, short skirts and tops that reveal the shoulders and upper arms. Temples, mosques and churches require modest attire to enter. Slip-on shoes are also a good idea, as it is customary to remove shoes in many of these places.

For work, smart casual is standard, which for men means shirts (long- or short-sleeve, but not T-shirts), trousers and shoes (not athletic shoes). For women, slacks and pantsuits are suitable, along with pumps or strappy heels. Smart casual is acceptable everywhere except for formal business dining or when other dress is specified in an invitation.

Singaporeans love their interiors to feel like an igloo, so it's a good idea to pack a cardigan or light jacket you can throw on indoors. This will lower the risk of catching a cold, even though the outdoor temperatures will likely feel high. Unexpected rain in Singapore is to be expected, so a collapsible umbrella is a useful item to carry along.

## Transportation

Getting around Singapore is easy. The roads are well-maintained, with expressways crisscrossing the island. Under normal conditions, driving the length of the island takes about an hour. Be aware that access to certain roads is restricted during peak times and that parking is limited.

We recommend public transportation, which is cheap and reliable. The efficient, air-conditioned Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) trains serve most areas of the city you'll want to visit, including Orchard Road. MRT's fourth line, the Circle Line, recently added 12 new stations and easier access to the western parts of the island, including Holland Village, Buona Vista, Bukit Timah and Thomson.

The public buses—most are air-conditioned—go to all tourist attractions. They run more slowly than the trains, but service is frequent and more comprehensive.

Walking around Singapore is another easy option, provided the weather cooperates. Watch for slippery "five-foot ways," the walkways immediately in front of shops that have been decorated with slick tile or are out of alignment with the rest of the sidewalk. And keep in mind that smoking, spitting or jaywalking within 100 ft/33 m of a pedestrian crossing may result in your contributing to the city's coffers.



## Car

In Singapore, cars are driven on the left side of the road. Nine expressways span the island, and all are indicated on road signs by their various acronyms. The major ones are the ECP (East Coast Parkway), which runs across the southeastern part of the island; the PIE (Pan-Island Expressway), which spans from the east to the west side of the island; and the CTE (Central Expressway) which runs north to south and crosses the central part of the island.

Traffic is not always a problem, but roads tend to be congested during peak hours (Monday-Friday 7:30-9:30 am and 5-7 pm, Saturday 7:30-9:30 am and 1-3 pm), especially in the business district. To minimize traffic congestion, all cars have an in-vehicle unit that, when tripped by electronic sensors on busy roads, deducts value from a cashcard as a toll fee. One-way streets that frequently change names can make navigating the island a challenge.

Parking in the business district during the day is difficult and expensive. The Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) and the Housing Development Board (HDB) parking lots have a limited number of automated spots. Many require a parking coupon, which may be purchased at post offices, department stores and gas stations throughout the country. Major buildings have limited hourly parking. Charges vary and are displayed at parking-lot entrances.

With other means of transportation readily available, it's best to leave the driving to others, especially if you're not familiar with the roads or used to driving on the left side of the road. The undeterred will find Avis and Hertz car rental booths in the lower levels of Terminals No. 1, 2 and 3. Booths are open from 7 am-11 pm.

The minimum driving age in Singapore is 18, and you must be at least 18 years old to rent a car.

## Taxi

Taxis are plentiful, but an empty one can be hard to find during rain or peak hours (8-9:30 am and 4:30-7 pm). If you really need a taxi during those times, your best bet is to call for one and pay the modest booking charge. Otherwise, taxi stands are conveniently located around the city and at all major shopping complexes. Try Comfort and CityCab at 6552-1111. This taxi network also provides limos and taxis for the wheelchair-bound upon request (<http://www.cdgtaxi.com.sg/home.mvn>).

Other companies include Premier Taxi (phone 6363-6888) or SMRT Taxi (phone 6555-8888). Taxi apps are also popular now. If you are on data roaming with a smartphone, you may want to consider downloading the free GrabTaxi app, which allows you to book taxis directly with the various transportation companies.

All taxis are metered, but be aware that there are additional charges for such things as booking in advance, trips to the airport, trips to and from the Central Business District and trips during peak hours. Extra charges are shown on a tariff card in the taxi. Tips are not expected. Drivers are kept honest by the Singapore Tourist Board, which takes complaints about cabbies very seriously.



## Koh Samui, Thailand

### Overview

#### Introduction

Koh Samui, 295 mi/475 km south of Bangkok, was one of Thailand's early tourist developments. With its international airport and visitors flying in for a week of sun and sea, it sometimes resembles a foreign country. In the two main towns—particularly Chaweng—clubs, bars and large hotels dominate. Although quieter areas can still be found, the island



is suffering badly from uncontrolled over-development. Despite the numbers of tourists, Koh Samui does have lovely beaches and water that's a magical blue-green. The idyllic atmosphere can still be found—it's just that there are now three to four times as many people enjoying it.

Those who aren't interested in the newer hotels can find "hut-els" along the shores of various beaches. These simple lodgings range from thatched-roof huts, with nothing more than a built-in platform, to slightly bigger thatched huts with showers and squat-toilets (two footrests and a hole in the floor). Chaweng Beach is still a favorite, though it's the most crowded. It's also close to a variety of restaurants. For a relatively quieter bit of sand, try Choeng Mon Beach or Big Buddha Beach. When it gets too hot, find a hammock in the shade of a seaside grove of coconut palms and watch the fishing boats float by. You can also rent a bicycle or motorcycle (a paved road circles the island), or follow one of the hiking paths that lead inland to waterfalls. Dive trips are also available to the reefs off neighboring Koh Tao.

Maenam, up north, is one of Koh Samui's quietest and most beautiful beaches. Although some of the more upmarket resorts have already discovered its charms, it still offers some remarkably good and inexpensive accommodations. It is an idyllic setting; the stretch of fine yellow sand is lapped by clear waters, and in the distance, Koh Pha Ngan is visible. Resorts and beach cafes line the shore, but Maenam is far less crowded than Chaweng, offering beach lovers a little piece of paradise without being too far removed from the action.

An interesting side trip is a daylong cruise to the Ang Thong National Marine Park. The park is a series of beautiful tropical isles with wild rock formations and coral reefs; the snorkeling there is excellent. To get to Koh Samui, fly from Bangkok or Phuket, or take the bus (about an 11-hour ride) or train (slightly faster) from Bangkok to Surat Thani, and then catch a ferry for a two-hour ride to the island.

Cruise ships dock at the Port of Ko Samui in Na Thon, the main port city where the mainland ferries also arrive. There is no passenger terminal, but taxis will be waiting at the pier. Negotiate your price before stepping into the vehicle. Be prepared for the fact that drivers will try to sell you a full-day tour of the island. If this interests you, bargain hard.

The easiest and cheapest way to reach the beach is by *songthaew*, a shared pickup that doubles as a local bus. Just flag one down that's heading in your direction. From Na Thon pier, which is on the island's west side, you'll want to travel clockwise and north to reach Big Buddha or Chaweng Beach.



## Bangkok, Thailand

### Overview

#### Introduction

Bangkok, Thailand, can soothe or ruffle, and it often does both. While contemplating the sunrise at a temple or monks collecting alms, you'll marvel at what peace can be found in the midst of such a chaotic metropolis.

A cultural hub in Southeast Asia, Bangkok is a collage of urban squalor, gleaming affluence, mass consumerism and pollution. Most certainly, the city will assault your senses. It's fascinating and indulgent, but it requires time and patience.



Comfort of one sort or another is never far away: When your feet tire of wandering through the Grand Palace, head over to neighboring Wat Pho for an hour-long foot massage; if you exhaust your meager supply of Thai words bargaining for souvenirs, pop into an air-conditioned movie theater and take in an English-language film; if you are overwhelmed by the density of people along Sampeng Lane in Chinatown, drop into a coffee shop or open-air restaurant and enjoy a cool drink; if you are looking for excitement, you can watch Muay Thai (kickboxing) at Lumpini Boxing Stadium or hang around with backpackers at the bars on Khao San Road.

Upon arrival, you may find the constant din shocking, the geography impossible (no map does justice to the city's meandering lanes), and the traffic absolutely unbelievable. But stay more than a night or two and the city's bewildering kaleidoscope begins to make sense. Although the cacophony will never melt away, soon it will transmit the excitement and vibrant charm of one of the world's greatest cities.

### Highlights

**Sights**—The Grand Palace; Wat Pho; Chatuchak Market; the sunset over Wat Arun; the Chao Mae Tubtim.

**Museums**—The National Museum; the Royal Barges Museum; Jim Thompson House and Museum; the BACC (Bangkok Art and Culture Centre); Kamthieng House.

**Memorable Meals**—A dinner cruise on the Chao Phraya River and canals aboard the *Manohra*; seafood and fabulous views at Supatra River House; fine Japanese food at Koi; pad thai, the country's quintessential noodle dish, delicious street food at the many food stalls in Chinatown; award-winning Thai cuisine at Nahm.

**Late Night**—Jazz at the Saxophone Pub and Restaurant or Brown Sugar; eating at one of the top international restaurants on the trendy Soi Thonglor; dancing at the Bed Supperclub; bar-hopping along Sukhumvit's bustling Soi 11; hanging out with the backpackers in the bars on Khaosan Road; a taste of the risqué nightlife in Patpong or Soi Cowboy.

**Walks**—Traversing Sukhumvit Road; exploring the little shops of Chinatown; strolling through Lumpini Park in early morning; exploring the green oasis of Bang Kra Jao.





## Geography

Old Bangkok sits on the east bank of the Chao Phraya River. It encompasses many government buildings, as well as important landmarks such as the Grand Palace, the Temple of the Reclining Buddha (Wat Pho) and the Temple of the Emerald Buddha (Wat Phra Kaew).

Many businesses and hotels are located in the city center, east and southeast of Old Bangkok in the Silom and Sukhumvit areas. The Sukhumvit Road district is the tourist heart of the city, with many fine restaurants, department stores, world-class business hotels such as the Sheraton Grande Sukhumvit, and the city's hippest bars and clubs. Nightlife thrives in Sukhumvit and Silom (Silom is where you'll find Patpong, the infamous red-light district). Around the intersection of Rama I and Phayathai roads is Bangkok's major shopping hub with many blocks of shops.

Another area for posh hotels and fine shopping is along the river north of Thaksin Bridge; look for the River City Shopping Complex, a great source of Asian antiques.

Be aware that some addresses include a *soi* number at the end. A *soi* is a side street or alley. In such cases, the first numbers usually indicate a street address, followed by a street name and then the *soi* number. Example: 21/3 Sukhumvit 11 would mean that the building 21/3 is off Sukhumvit Road and down Soi 11. You may also see this written as 21/3 Sukhumvit Soi 11. Outside the center, "road" is written on the signs as *thanon*, for example Thanon Sriyan. And don't look for consistency in spelling of street names or tourist spots—there are no hard and fast rules for transliterating Thai into English. For example, you'll soon find out that Rajadamri Road and Ratchadamri Road are one and the same, as are Chitlom and Chid Lom, and Triamit and Tri Mitr.

## History

Until the late 1700s, the area now known as Bangkok was a small village across the river from the then-capital of Thonburi. In 1782, under the threat of a Burmese attack, the capital and its inhabitants moved to the village, which was named Krung Thep. (The Burmese attack never came.)

It was not until the late 1800s that Bangkok took off as a trade center in the region.

Bangkok's rise as a trading power owed much to the enterprising King Mongkut and his son King Chulalongkorn, who both developed relations with the West. By positioning itself as a Western ally, Thailand was the only country in the region never colonized, and to this day, the country has a mutually beneficial relationship with the West.

After a revolution in 1932, Thailand's monarchs lost their absolute power as the government adopted a constitutional monarchy. After protests brought down a military government in 1992, the military stayed out of politics, and a constitution promulgated in 1997 was seen as a major step toward democratic rule.

In the 1960s, soldiers on leave from the Vietnam War flooded into nearby Thailand, using the country as a place for rest and recuperation. In the decades that followed, a significant economic boom and the development of a strong tourist industry transformed Bangkok into a bustling, smoggy, skyscraper-filled metropolis.

Bangkok spent two decades trying to recover from major health and financial crises. The HIV/AIDS explosion in the 1980s hit Thailand especially hard because of the widespread prostitution throughout the country. Likewise, the Thai economy suffered a violent shock in 1997, when the national currency lost much of its value.



Thailand's successful efforts to fight HIV/AIDS have been recognized internationally, and the economic woes of the 1997 crash were recovered from, though development has not returned to the booming growth rates of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Tourism has quickly become one of the country's chief sources of foreign capital.

In September 2006, the military ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's Thai Rak Thai government in a bloodless coup d'etat. In late 2006 and early 2007, the military-appointed government wrote a new constitution. In December 2007, in a move to return the country to democracy, a general election was held and was won by the People's Power Party (PPP), led by Samak Sundaravej and sympathetic to deposed Prime Minister Thaksin. Samak won the election, but not with an overall majority. A coalition government led by the PPP was formed.

Thaksin returned to Thailand in 2008 but fled again. Violent demonstrations and court rulings led to Samak's dismissal. The Thai parliament elected Somchai Wongsawat (PPP) as prime minister, which led to an escalation between Thaksin's supporters (sporting red shirts) and anti-Thaksin royalists (yellow shirts). Thailand's Constitutional Court found the ruling PPP guilty of electoral fraud on 2 December 2008 and the party was dissolved, ending Somchai's term. Shortly afterward, protestors blocked Bangkok airports, leaving travelers stranded and causing Thailand's winter tourism season (typically its high season) to suffer. Unfortunately, the situation remains at least partly unresolved.

In 2010, violence flared again after red-shirt protesters set up stockades in central Bangkok that were eventually smashed in by the Thai military. During the protests and the military crackdown, there was street-to-street fighting and a large department store, Central World, was partly gutted by fire (although it has since reopened). Nearly 100 people, including some foreign journalists, died. While the protests were removed, the underlying issues remain unaddressed.

Political unrest continues to dog the country. In late 2013 and early 2014, a series of protracted demonstrations and sit-ins by opponents of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, Thaksin's sister, and her Pheu Thai Party caused severe disruption in Bangkok. An election held in February 2014 was also boycotted by the opposition. Visitors to Bangkok should work to remain informed of developments and take heed of travel advisories issued by their country's embassy.

## **Port Information**

### **Location**

Because of traffic and limited capacity at Bangkok's main port, most cruise ships dock in Laem Chabang, an industrial port city about 80 mi/125 km south of Bangkok. From there, companies offer shore excursions into the capital, usually via air-conditioned bus, a journey that takes about two hours each way, depending on traffic. Smaller ships dock directly at Khlong Toei Port, also known as Bangkok Port, on the Chao Phraya River, Bangkok's main waterway.

### **Potpourri**

Bangkok has the longest official city name in the world: Krung Thep Mahanakhon Amorn Rattanakosin Mahintara Yudthaya Mahadilok Pohp Noparat Rajathanee Bureerom Udomrajniwes Mahasatarn Amorn Pimarn Avaltarnsatit Sakatattiya Visanukram Prasit. Usually Thais refer to it as Krung Thep, meaning "city of angels."



Bangkok has one of the world's largest Chinatowns. According to local superstition, the long winding Yaowarat Road resembles a dragon's body and is therefore an auspicious place to conduct business. More than 130 gold shops are found there.

Spread across 8 acres/3 hectares and seating up to 5,000 guests, the Royal Dragon restaurant in Bangkok was the largest restaurant in the world until it was bumped off the top spot by a restaurant in Syria. Its 1,000-strong staff is capable of turning out 3,000 dishes per hour.

Wat Pho, thought to be one of the city's oldest temples, houses a massive reclining Buddha. Covered in gold leaf, it is 151 ft/46 m long and 49 ft/15 m high.

It wasn't until 1941 that the Thai Prime Minister Phibunsongkhram declared that 1 January would become the official start of the New Year. Today, both 1 January and 13-15 April, the period of the old New Year known as Songkran, are public holidays.

Suvarnabhumi International Airport was built on a marsh called Cobra Swamp 15 mi/24 km east of Bangkok. The name Suvarnabhumi, chosen by the King of Thailand, means "Golden Land."

Chatuchak Market covers 27 acres/11 hectares, making it one of the largest markets in the world.

Traditionally, each Thai person has a birth color, depending on what day they were born. Born on a Monday, the king is represented by the color yellow, hence the yellow flags flying atop of almost every wall and building in the city.

## See & Do

### Sightseeing

You need not travel far in Bangkok to find that it's an exciting—and sometimes exhausting—blend of modern civilization and historic treasures. Bangkok's temples, despite being in the center of a thriving 21st-century metropolis, are some of the finest in all of Asia.

The most spectacular are centered in Ko Rattanakosin (in English, Rattanakosin Island, even though it is not an island) and include the Grand Palace complex (the old royal city, from which the king and a vast number of relatives ran the country until 1932). The complex includes the Grand Palace itself and the Temple of the Emerald Buddha (Wat Phra Kaew). Equally impressive is Wat Pho, which houses an enormous reclining Buddha. Wat Pho is also famous for its traditional massage school.

Be sure to see the National Museum, which houses Thai art and artifacts from Neolithic times to the present; the Vimanmek Teak Palace; and the Royal Barges Museum. Wat Arun (Temple of the Dawn) is on the other side of the Chao Phraya River. Very popular with locals and camera-toting foreigners, the small Erawan Shrine at the corner of Ratchadamri and Ploenchit roads is a nice place to witness classical Thai dancers who perform whenever a devotee makes a suitable donation.

The BTS Skytrain, MRT subway and taxis are convenient and inexpensive ways to see Bangkok's attractions. Special day passes offer a good value. The key is to work out where the stations are located in relation to the places you want to visit. Take the train to the closest point, and then walk or take a bus or a taxi for the final leg. The Skytrain and MRT avoid traffic, and one can cross the city in minutes at very little cost.



Also consider cruising down the river and canals on an extremely cheap commuter ferry or a modestly priced long-tail boat. Or you can enjoy evening dining on a luxurious, restored teakwood rice barge and see the riverside temples lit up in all their glory. If you're walking, drink plenty of fluids, wear comfortable shoes and take a good map with you.

Know that admission prices to the various museums and temples change frequently. As in many other major cities, if you check the city listings, or merely walk around the busy areas, you can find some very interesting temporary exhibits that are either free of charge or cost very little. If you intend to visit temples, ensure that you are dressed modestly—no shorts or tank tops.

## Historic Sites

### Chao Mae Tubtim

Nai Lert Park, 2 Wireless Road (behind the Swissotel Nai Lert Park)  
Bangkok, Thailand

Located behind the Swissotel Nai Lert Park, this famous Buddhist shrine was once a spirit house built by Nai Lert, the hotel's original owner, for Jao Mae Tubtim, a female spirit thought to live in a large ficus tree in the garden. The shrine is noted for the collection of wooden and stone phallic sculptures that surrounds it. Women seeking to conceive leave offerings of flowering jasmine and lotus blossoms.

Open daily during daylight hours. Free.

### Equestrian Statue

Ratchadamnoen Road  
Bangkok, Thailand

King Rama V commissioned this statue in 1908 to celebrate the 40th anniversary of his ascension to the throne. Cast by a French sculptor in Paris, it is located in the center of the Dusit Palace garden in front of the Anantasamakhom Palace. On 23 October, the statue is draped in garlands and flowers to commemorate the anniversary of Rama's death.

### Erawan Shrine

Grand Hyatt Erawan (on the northwest corner of the property, near the Chitlom stop on the Skytrain)  
Bangkok, Thailand

This large, open-air shrine at the Ratchaprasong intersection was built in 1956 to appease the evil spirits dogging the construction of the original Erawan Hotel (now replaced by the Grand Hyatt Erawan). Once the shrine opened, accidents that plagued the building site are said to have ceased. Dedicated to Brahma, the four-faced Than Tao Mahaprom shrine has become popular with Bangkokians. The shrine is a good place to see traditional Thai dance performed throughout the day for those who make a donation.

Accessible daily 6 am-midnight. Free.

### Lak Meuang

Sanam Luang (on the southeast corner by the grassy area in front of the Grand Palace, between Na Phra That and Ratchadamnoen roads)  
Bangkok, Thailand



Also called the City Pillar, Lak Meuang sits in a small shrine a five-minute walk from the Grand Palace. The gilded pillar is considered the foundation stone of the city. It attracts many locals who believe the pillar has the power to grant wishes. Foreign tourists may find the Erawan Shrine to be of more interest.

Daily 5:30 am-7:30 pm. Traditional Thai dances are performed at the shrine 8:30 am-3:30 pm (till 4 pm Sunday). Free.

## The Democracy Monument

Ratchadamnoen Road (at Pracha Thipatai Road)  
Bangkok, Thailand

This monument was erected in 1939 to commemorate the 24 June 1932 coup that ended the 150-year-old absolute monarchy and introduced a constitutional government to Thailand. One of Italian sculptor Corrado Feroci's most striking monuments, it has four arched columns at the center, surrounded by a ring of 75 cannons. In more recent times, the monument has served as a rallying point for protests; in both 1992 and 2010, Thai protesters were killed there.

## The Grand Palace

Main entrance is on Na Phralan Road (if you take the Chao Phraya Express Boat, it's within walking distance—east and south—from the Tha Chang pier)  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-623-5500, ext. 3100

<http://www.palaces.thai.net>

Located on the banks of the Chao Phraya River, the Grand Palace is one of the most famous attractions in all of Thailand. It's actually a large complex that includes many structures, including the Grand Palace itself, with its fantastic spires and ornamentation, and Wat Phra Kaew. Originally built for King Rama I in the late 1700s, the compound has evolved into a vast, golden city that's a top destination for this country's predominantly Buddhist population. The Grand Palace was the king's official residence until 1946. Wat Phra Kaew, the most important structure inside the walled compound, houses the ancient Emerald Buddha (carved from a single block of jade). Don't wait until your last day in town to see the Grand Palace—many people want to see it more than once.

A few rules for visiting the Grand Palace: No shorts, sleeveless shirts, tight or torn jeans, or leggings. Proper clothing is available for rent just within the entrance; the 200-baht deposit per piece will be refunded, and countless vendors will happily sell you wraps and other apparel just outside the entrance. No photography inside Wat Phra Kaew. Women must not touch the monks.

Daily 8:30 am-3:30 pm. There are free, English-language walking tours through the Palace at 10 and 10:30 am, and at 1:30 and 2 pm. Inquire at the ticket kiosk. 500 baht (includes admission to the Vimanmek Teak Palace in the Dusit area within seven days of purchase). Audioguides can be rented for 200 baht.

## The Victory Monument

Phaya Thai Road (at the junction of Phahon Yothin and Rachawithi roads)  
Bangkok, Thailand

Designed by Italian sculptor Corrado Feroci, this monument consists of an obelisk ringed by statues representing the army, navy, air force, police and civilians. It was built to commemorate Thailand's victory



in its 1940-41 border war with France over land in present-day Cambodia and along the Thai-Laos border.

## Wat Arun

34 Arun Amarin Road (by water taxi from Tha Tien pier, at the end of Thai Wang Road near Wat Pho, or from Tha Chang pier, at the end of Na Phralan Road near Wat Phra Kaew)  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-891-2185

<http://www.watarun.net>

This is one of the best-known and most photographed landmarks in Bangkok. The name means Temple of Dawn, and the structure consists of one elongated *prang* (Khmer-style tower) surrounded by four smaller ones. The main *prang*, 269 ft/82 m high, is decorated with mosaics made of porcelain that glisten in the sun. The porcelain arrived in Bangkok as ballast in Chinese trading vessels.

Unlike many of Bangkok's other temples, this one looks better from a distance, especially when viewed from across the river. Despite its name, the best photographs are taken as the sun sets behind it.

Daily 7:30 am-5:30 pm. 50 baht adults.

## Wat Benchamabophit

Th Si Ayutthaya (at Th Phra Ram V, diagonally opposite from Chitlada Palace; buses 3, 72 and 503 stop nearby)  
Bangkok, Thailand

Sometimes called the Marble Temple, this holy site features splendid, symmetrical architecture with gold and lacquer decorations. It has numerous Buddha images in the courtyard, all representing famous styles from other Buddhist countries. Unlike other temples, the monks there stand in a long row (at 6 am) to accept alms rather than roam the streets to seek them.

Daily 6 am-6 pm. 20 baht.

## Wat Pho (Wat Phra Chetuphon)

2 Sanamchai Road (within walking distance of Tha Tien pier)  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-226-0335

<http://www.watpho.com>

Next to the Grand Palace, this is one of Bangkok's oldest temples, and it's famous for its numerous ceramic-tiled *stupas* and its gold-plated reclining Buddha—it's one of the largest Buddhas in Thailand (152 ft/46 m long and 49 ft/15 m high). Walk its whole length—the mother-of-pearl inlay on the soles of his feet is sensational. As you explore the temple, you'll see much smaller images of Buddha everywhere. One of Thailand's most-respected teaching centers of traditional Thai massage, Wat Pho also offers massage and reflexology to tired tourists for a reasonable fee. Visitors can sign up for courses to learn the art of massage. The temple is also well-regarded for its fortune tellers and astrologers, as well, who will predict your future for a fee.

Daily 8:30 am-6 pm. 50 baht.



## Wat Ratchanatdaram

Ratchadamnoen Klang (at Maha Chai Road, Phra Nakhon district)  
Bangkok, Thailand

This temple is famous for the Loha Prasat or Metal Castle, a square, three-story construction with 37 spires symbolizing the 37 qualities required to achieve enlightenment in Buddhism. Constructed in 1846, it was modeled on similar temples in India and Sri Lanka. Despite its name, the temple is made from bricks and mortar: only the spires are metal. One *viharn*—or temple hall—in the compound features an enormous Buddha image and beautiful murals.

Daily 8 am-5 pm.

## Wat Saket and the Golden Mount

Chakkraphatdiphong Road, Ban Bat, Pom Prap Sattru Phai  
Bangkok, Thailand

The major feature at this temple is the Golden Mount, a man-made hill constructed during the reign of King Rama III in the 1800s and topped by a Lanka-style *chedi* covered in gold leaf. From the *chedi*, visitors can enjoy panoramic views of historic Bangkok.

Daily 8:30 am-5 pm.

## Wat Suthat and the Giant Swing

Bamrung Meuang Road  
Bangkok, Thailand

This temple is noted for its superb 19th-century murals in the main chapel. The main hall houses a beautiful 13th-century, 26-ft/8-m bronze Buddha image. The ashes of King Rama VIII, brother of the current king, are contained in its base. The distinctive giant swing outside the temple was once used in Brahmanic ceremonies, long since discontinued. The original swing, known as *sao ching chor*, was replaced to honor the King of Thailand. Nearby shops stock a comprehensive range of Buddhist religious supplies—it is a fascinating part of town to wander through.

Open daily 8:30 am-9 pm. Admission 20 baht.

## Wat Traimit (Temple of the Golden Buddha)

Yaowarat Road (at Charoen Krung Road, eastern edge of Chinatown, close to Hualamphong Station)  
Bangkok, Thailand

This temple houses the famous 14th-century Golden Buddha. Made primarily of gold and weighing more than 10,000 lb/4,500 kg, it was discovered under an unremarkable concrete veneer in 1954, where it lay hidden for hundreds of years. It is believed that the statue was initially covered in plaster to protect it from Burmese invaders and was then forgotten. There is a museum on-site that traces the history of the statue.

Daily 8 am-5 pm. 40 baht for the temple, an additional 100 baht for each of the two museums.



## Museums

### Ancient City

296/1 Thanon Sukhumvit, Tambon Bang PuM Mai, Amphoe Mueang Samut Prakan, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-323-9253

<http://ancientcitygroup.net/ancientsiam/en>

Also known as Meuang Boran, this expansive 320-acre/115-hectare outdoor museum just outside of Bangkok consists of small-scale replicas of Thailand's most famous buildings, monuments and temples. It has even been laid out to simulate the geographic shape of the country. Vehicles are available on-site to take you around, but we recommend hiring a car and driver for the day so that you can go at your own pace.

Daily 8 am-5 pm. 500 baht adults, 250 baht children. Bike rentals start at 50 baht. Private English-language guide costs 1,500 baht for two hours.

### Jim Thompson House and Museum

6 Soi Kasemsan 2, Rama 1 Road (near the National Stadium BTS station) Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-216-7368

<http://www.jimthompsonhouse.com>

This complex of six teak houses was built for Thailand's most famous *farang* (foreigner), the U.S. citizen credited with revitalizing Thailand's silk industry. The house is filled with Thompson's rare art and antiques collection. Since Thompson's puzzling disappearance in Malaysia in 1967, his former residence has become a popular tourist attraction. The James H.W. Thompson Foundation also opened a store and cafe next door. Be sure to visit the interesting art gallery above the gift shop.

Daily 9 am-5 pm. Last guided tour begins at 5 pm. 100 baht adults, 50 baht students and children (includes compulsory tour offered in several languages, including English).

### Kamthieng House

131 Soi Asoke Montri Road (Sukhumvit 21, inside the compound of the Siam Society) Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-6616-4707

<http://www.siam-society.org>

Kamthieng House was originally built in Chiang Mai more than 160 years ago. The traditional northern-style house was later donated to the Siam Society and was reconstructed in Bangkok. It serves as a folk and ethnological museum exhibiting the northerners' way of life and various household items and equipment they used. The Siam Society, under Royal Patronage, was established in 1904 by Thai and foreign residents of Bangkok to further the study of artistic, scientific and other cultural affairs in Thailand and Southeast Asia. It holds regular lectures by visiting scholars and features a library, exhibition space and shop. Located a two-minute walk from Sukhumvit subway station (exit 1) and a five-minute walk from Asoke skytrain station (exit 3).

Open Tuesday-Saturday 9 am-5 pm. Admission 100 baht.





## Museum of Contemporary Art

499 Moo 3, Vibhavadi Rangsit Road  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-953-1005-7

<http://www.mocabangkok.com>

This museum is one of the few exceptions, if not the only art museum in the city that looks forward rather than backward. While still maintaining its Thai identity, the paintings and sculptures, all by Thai artists, have an individualist feel inspired as much by European modernism as their own culture. In fact, the owner of the museum states he opened it to honor the influence of Professor Silpa Bhasri—an Italian artist who spent much of his working life teaching art in Bangkok.

Open daily except Monday 10 am-6 pm. Entry is 180 baht, and there are also family ticket promotions available. Free for children younger than 15, visitors with disabilities, and seniors older than 60.

## Museum of Siam

4 Sanamchai Road, Phra Borom Ratcha Wang (near Rachini Pier)  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-225-2777, ext. 123

<http://www.museumsiam.com>

Video presentations and interactive media take you through the history of Siam in an entertaining and accessible way. It may not have the depth of the national museum, but for kids in particular, it makes for a fun and informative day out.

Open daily except Monday 10 am-6 pm. 300 baht adults; free for children, visitors with disabilities and seniors older than 60.

## Rattanakosin Exhibition Hall

100 Racha Damnoen Klang Ave., Bawonniwet  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-621-0044

<http://www.nitasrattanakosin.com>

The Rattankosin Exhibition Hall is another museum perfect for kids. Using interactive multimedia, it takes visitors from 1782 to the present day. On the way, visitors learn about the Thai way of life and the Legend of the Emerald Buddha. Well worth seeing is the 3-D multimedia presentation, where visitors stand in the center of a room watching and learning Thai traditional dance and theater. Its only downside is that visitors, rather than having the freedom to wander around at their leisure, have to go on one of the two-hour tours.

Open daily except Monday 10 am-7 pm. 200 baht adults; free for children and visitors with disabilities.



## Royal Barges Museum

Khlong Bangkok Noi (near Phra Prinklao Bridge on the western side of the Chao Phraya River)  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-424-0004

[http://www.nationalmuseums.finearts.go.th/thaimuseum\\_eng/royalbarges/history.html](http://www.nationalmuseums.finearts.go.th/thaimuseum_eng/royalbarges/history.html)

This museum houses about 50 ornately designed longboats once used by Thai kings. Although fewer than a dozen are on public display, the boats are a spectacle, even on land. Be sure to see the one called *Sri Suppanhong* (golden swan). The barge is arguably the most impressive, with a swan figurehead carved into the bow; its crew included 50 paddlers, seven umbrella holders, two rudder controllers, two navigators, a flagman and a conductor. *Khlong* (canal) tours often stop at the museum.

Daily 9 am-5 pm. Closed New Year's Eve, New Year's Day and 12-14 April. 100 baht (plus an additional 100 baht if you want to take pictures).

## Siriraj Medical Museum

Siriraj Hospital, 2 Prannok Road (Express Boat Pier N10 Tha Wang Lang)  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-4192-6189

<http://www.si.mahidol.ac.th/museums/en>

Located on the second floor of Siriraj Hospital, this is the museum of the macabre, featuring medical anomalies, injuries and sensational criminal cases. The most notorious—and popular—is the mummified body of Si Ouey, a cannibal who murdered children and ate their organs. Some may find a visit to this museum particularly disturbing or voyeuristic. Not recommended for children.

Open daily except Tuesday 10 am-5 pm. 200 baht.

## Thai Life Permanent Exhibition Hall

Thailand Cultural Centre, Ratchadaphisek Road, Huay Kwang (MRT subway Thai Cultural Center station)  
Bangkok, Thailand

This interesting exhibition charts the history of the Thai people and the different aspects of Thai culture, from prehistoric times to the present. The museum covers five topics: the evolution of the Thai nation, rice and the Thai way of life, Thai language and literature, Thailand and the world, and important achievements and events in Thai society.

Open Monday-Saturday (except public holidays) 9:30 am-4 pm. Free.

## The Museum of Buddhist Art

104 Soi 40, Phatthanakan Road, Suan Luang  
Bangkok, Thailand

Operated by the Foundation for the Preservation of Thai Arts, this museum features a large private collection of images of the Buddha. The exhibition charts the art of Buddha images throughout Thai history, with high standards of presentation that include light, sound (chanting) and incense. In addition to Buddha images and artifacts from different periods, there is also a shrine.



Open Tuesday-Saturday 10 am-5:30 pm. Advance reservations required for visits except on Saturday. Admission 250 baht.

## The National Museum

4 Na Phrathat Road (opposite Sanam Luang, between Thammasat University and the National Theatre)  
Bangkok, Thailand

In 1884, King Rama V turned these buildings into a museum to display his vast collection of art and artifacts from around the country (as well as items he picked up during his travels abroad). The collection has grown over the years, and it's now considered the largest in Southeast Asia. With artifacts ranging from Neolithic to modern times, the collection also includes everything from royal cremation chariots and weaponry to delicate textiles and ivory carvings to giant shadow puppets. Volunteers give free English-language tours on Wednesday and Thursday beginning at 9:30 am. No photography is permitted within the exhibits.

Open Wednesday-Sunday 9 am-4 pm. 200 baht adults.

## The Queen's Gallery

101 Rajchadamnuen Klang Ave.  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-2815-3601

<http://www.queengallery.org>

Built in 1903, this modern gallery in the Musical Art Center Building of Bangkok Bank was established by Queen Sirikit to promote Thai arts and culture. The five-story building displays paintings, sculpture, fine art and a variety of art-appreciation events for the general public.

Daily except Wednesday 10 am-7 pm. 30 baht.

## Vimanmek Teak Palace

Rajavithi Road, Dusit  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-628-6300

<http://www.vimanmek.com>

This structure is the world's largest teak building. It was built by King Rama V in 1868 on the island of Koh Si Chang as a summer palace and moved to its current location in 1910. With 81 rooms and priceless antiques and paintings, it's a fine tribute to Thai architecture and art. You can't walk around on your own, but there are free guided tours in English every half-hour starting at 9:30 am. Free demonstrations of Thai dance in the foyer daily at 10:30 am and 2 pm.

The palace is open daily except Monday 9:30 am-4 pm. Last tickets sold at 3:15 pm. No shorts, flip-flops or revealing clothes. 100 baht adults (free if you have an entrance ticket to the Grand Palace).



## Wang Suan Phakkard

352-354 Sri Ayutthaya Road  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-245-4934

<http://www.suanpakkad.com>

The name is sometimes translated as the "Chinese cabbage palace," and indeed the land that this group of traditional Thai houses sits on was once used to grow the vegetable. The five-building compound, set in beautiful landscaping, houses the treasures of its former owner and avid collector, Princess Chumbhot of Nagor Svarga. Don't leave without seeing the large collection of Ban Chiang pottery in the Lacquer Pavilion.

Open Monday-Saturday 9 am-4 pm. 150 baht adults.

## Neighborhoods & Districts

### Chinatown and Little India

Yaowarat Road is the backbone of Chinatown, but the spirit of the district lies in the *sois* that branch off this traffic-ridden road. In the interwoven mesh of alleys and lanes that crisscross the canals, you'll find some fantastic fresh-food hawkers, a seemingly limitless number of streetside merchants and traders, and the occasional Chinese temple. Sampaeng Lane is the best known of these areas and can be a great place to buy fashion accessories. Chinatown is also famous for its food, so keep an eye out for clusters of noodle and rice stalls that set up after the markets and shops close at sundown.

Pahurat (Little India) lies just northwest of Chinatown and is also a well-known spot for fabric purchases. Supposedly, silk can be bought at the lowest prices in the city at the market there—but you'll have to bargain hard and watch out for cheap imitations. For excellent quality, check out the Old Siam Plaza north of Pahurat Road. We like walking along Pahurat Road, north of the market, to see the stores filled with glittering Thai dance costumes and masks. There are also some great little Indian restaurants in the area offering cheap and authentic food. Beware of pickpockets in both areas and take the most detailed map you can find.

### Former Foreign Quarter

The old foreign quarter of Bangkok makes for a pleasant afternoon stroll. Once home to European consulates and trading companies, the four-block area between Charoen Krung 34 (also known as New Road) and the Oriental Hotel on Charoen Krung 40 is an interesting mix of cultures and architectural styles. As you explore, be sure to stop inside the beautiful 1910 Assumption Cathedral. Also check out the area around the Haroon Mosque and Cemetery. The maze of narrow alleys in this tiny Muslim community is home to a couple of breathtakingly beautiful (though dilapidated) Rattanakosin-era wooden Siamese houses.

### Khao San Road

A backpacker's mecca in Southeast Asia, this road is a 10-minute walk north of the old part of town (where the Grand Palace is situated) in the district of Banglamphu. Backpackers flock there because it has the least expensive (and grittiest) accommodations in Bangkok, as well as affordable restaurants and bars. The road is full of pedestrians 24 hours a day and lined with anything backpackers might need: massage parlors, travel agents, restaurants, bars, all manner of shops and Internet cafes. Makeshift stalls sell food and souvenirs. Among the Westerners, you'll find an increasing number of young Thais attracted



by the freewheeling atmosphere. Khao San Road is intense and gaudy, and it has to be seen to be believed.

## Patpong

Much is made of Patpong, one of the city's most notorious red-light districts. The two privately owned roads, Patpong 1 and Patpong 2, don't really feel sleazy unless you actually go into one of the clubs. The real danger lurks upstairs where the infamous (but actually rather bizarre) "ping-pong shows" take place and a couple of beers will set you back 2,000 baht in no time. The golden rule if you want to avoid being seriously ripped off is to stick to street-level bars. Even then, watch out for drinks you didn't order being added to the bill. These days Patpong is also noted for its busy night market, which also extends along Silom Road, and there are many cheap souvenir stalls lining the streets. Watch out for pickpockets. The streets are closed to vehicle traffic after sundown, and you'll find everything from counterfeit designer watches to T-shirts, silk, DVDs and crafts.

## Thonglor and Ekamai

Bangkok, Thailand

<http://www.thonglor-ekamai.com>

Thonglor and Ekamai are home to hip bars, clubs, antiques shops and art galleries. If visitors want to mix with the Thai celebrities and drink the world's best wine and eat the best food, both international and Thai, these two *soi*, just off Sukhumvit Road, are the place to be. Just don't expect any of it to be cheap. The best and most popular places to frequent include the Belgian pub House of Beers (HOBS for short) and the Shades of Retro, which is like drinking in a very cool—and comfortable—junk shop.

<http://www.thonglor-ekamai.com>.

## Parks & Gardens

### Benjasiri Park

Sukhumvit Road (near BTS Skytrain Phrom Phong station, between Soi 22 and Soi 24)  
Bangkok, Thailand

Also known as the Queen's Park, this small park is sandwiched between the Emporium shopping center and the Queen's Park Imperial Hotel. It's a nice place to take a break from the wall-to-wall commerce. The park is also popular with joggers in the early morning and evening hours, and it frequently hosts exhibitions and other open-air events.

Daily 5 am-9 pm. Free.

### Chatuchak Park

Phahonyothin Road (at Vibhavadi Rangsit Road, near the Mochit Skytrain station)  
Bangkok, Thailand

Located close to the famous Chatuchak Weekend Market, Bangkok's largest park features nine pieces of sculpture, bicycle rentals and a lake with paddleboats for hire. The pretty park is also popular with joggers.

Open daily 5 am-9 pm. Admission free.



## Lumpini Park

Rama IV Road (BTS Skytrain Sala Daeng station or MRT subway Lumpini station)  
Bangkok, Thailand

This inner-city park provides a respite from Bangkok's congestion and noise. There are good walking paths, bicycles for rent and even an artificial lake in the middle (you can rent a rowboat, but keep an eye out for the gigantic 3-ft-/1-m-long monitor lizards in the water). Try to visit in the early morning (around 6 am) to see locals practicing tai chi and ballroom dancing. Hosts the Bangkok Symphony Orchestra during the Concert in the Park festival each winter.

Daily 4:30 am-9 pm. Free.

## Rama IX Royal Park

Rama V Road  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-3281-3856

<http://www.suanluangrama9.or.th>

Spread over 200 acres/80 hectares, Bangkok's nicest park is full of lakes, greenery and a water park. Part of the park has been designated as an agricultural research center. Visit the park if you have a day or afternoon to spare—it's situated in the north of the city near the parliament.

Daily 6 am-6 pm. 10 baht.

## Santi Chai Prakan Pavilion and Public Park

Phra Athit Road  
Bangkok, Thailand

The park is on the banks of the Chao Phraya River, near Phra Sumen Fort. It opened in 1999 to mark the auspicious occasion of the sixth cycle (of 12 years) birthday anniversary of His Majesty the King. The pleasant park provides a scenic view of the Chao Phraya River and the Rama VIII Bridge. It is popular with Thais and foreigners, especially from the nearby Banglamphu/Khao San area.

Open daily. Admission free.

## Religious Sites

### Assumption Cathedral

23 Oriental Alley, Charoen Krung, Bank Rak  
Bangkok, Thailand

<http://www.assumption-cathedral.com>

Built in 1809 by a Thai-Portuguese priest, the church has been built in Renaissance style, with fresco walls and stucco sculptures that depict the ascension of Christ. The original structure was damaged in World War II, but it was renovated in time to receive Pope John Paul in 1984.

Daily 7 am-7 pm. Free.



## Brahman Temple

268 Thanon Dinsor Road, Phra Nakhon  
Bangkok, Thailand

Built in tandem with the Giant Swing, this temple was built to house Hindu gods during the reign of Rama I and was once used as a place for the Brahmins to practice ancient Hindu ceremonies.

Daily 8 am-6 pm.

## The World Fellowship of Buddhists

616 Benjasiri Park, Soi Medhinivet, Sukhumvit 24  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-6611-2847

<http://www.wfbhq.org>

The first Sunday of every month, the center presents a free English-language public program on Buddhism. The program includes a Buddhist forum, meditation instruction and practice.

Open daily except Saturday 8:30 am-4 pm.

## Tiger God Shrine

468 Tanao Road, Phra Nakhon  
Bangkok, Thailand

Built in 1834, the Tiger God Shrine is one of the oldest Chinese temples in the city, home to statues of the Guan Yu, Matsu, the Goddess of the Sea and the Tiger God—well-loved by both the Thai and Chinese for bestowing blessings of good fortune on followers, who curry her good favor with gifts of pork, eggs and sticky rice.

Daily 6 am-5 pm.

## Tonson Mosque

447 Wangderm Road, Wat Aroon  
Bangkok, Thailand

Originally called Kadee Yai, this 400-year-old mosque is the oldest in Bangkok, and is thought to have been built during the Ayutthaya period by Bangkok's earliest Muslim settlers. The present mosque was built to replace the original in 1936, and it also houses valuable antiques such as the bronze lamp used for Rama V's cremation ceremony. A graveyard for early Islamic leaders is also on-site.

Daily 6-10 am. Free.



## Recreation

Although early mornings are pleasant, Bangkok's steamy climate is a deterrent to those who enjoy watching and participating in most outdoor sports. Lumpini Park is a good spot for an early-morning walk or jog. There is a small and basic weight-lifting section as well.

Interest in health and fitness has mushroomed in Bangkok during the past few years, and all of the major hotels offer air-conditioned fitness facilities. Most also have swimming pools, and many have racquetball or tennis courts. Also, an increasing number of hotels feature spa retreats or spa-related treatments.

## Nightlife

Bangkok's "anything at any time" reputation has been severely hampered by the haphazard enforcement of the government's 2 am closing law—a policy implemented ostensibly to discourage drug consumption. It's a law that has restricted Bangkok's nightlife potential, and many establishments have adapted to the changes by opening earlier. After 2 am, you can still find a scattering of places open. These mostly consist of massage parlors for men only, *videoke* shops (which serve food and alcohol) and traditional streetside eateries.

In Banglamphu and Sukhumvit, the backpacker area, you will find some bars open illegally after-hours and even all night, as well as the ubiquitous 7-Elevens, which sell wine and beer as well as snacks and sundries. Licensing laws ban the sale of alcohol 2-5 pm and midnight-5 am in convenience stores. Cigarettes are no longer allowed to be displayed, but shops are allowed to have a "Cigarettes for Sale" sign.

Although technically illegal, prostitution continues to thrive in Bangkok, especially in the areas of Patpong, Soi Nana and Soi Cowboy. However, there's a growing awareness that the city has far more to offer than the sex-tourist trade.

As Bangkok sheds its old ways, the nightlife scene is becoming more upscale and trendy. New cocktail bars and clubs are opening all the time, hosting some remarkable young Thai bands that play blues and rock. (Always have an official photo ID with you, or you may not be allowed to enter.) Clubs may refuse entry to those younger than 20.

Ad-hoc street markets sell knock-off clothes, handicrafts, amulets and silver jewelry, offering passersby plenty to see. And then there are late-night eateries to take the edge off your hunger. Never let it be said that you can be bored (or hungry) in Bangkok. Sadly, the Suan Lum Night Bazaar, the city's well-known night market on the edge of Lumpini Park, has closed, the latest victim in Bangkok's race toward redevelopment. Talad Rod Fai is a good alternative, though it's more difficult to reach.

Some of the bars and clubs have gay nights. For more information on Bangkok's gay scene, visit <http://www.travelgaya.com/destination/gay-thailand/gay-bangkok>.





## Shopping

Bangkok is a city revitalized and has shaken off its image as a city of crowded markets and street traders. Sure, the bustling markets are still there, and Chatuchak, the world's largest, continues to attract the hordes bartering for a bargain, but Bangkok is becoming increasingly known as home to some of Asia's largest and most ostentatious shopping malls, stocked to the rafters with brand names and luxury goods.

The city is undoubtedly one of the world's great shopping destinations, attracting visitors from all over Southeast Asia. An added bonus for visitors is the value-added tax (VAT) refund on all items purchased, payable when they leave the country. Just show your passport when you make a purchase and present receipts to customs at the airport. Many stores also offer a special discount card for tourists.

Most of the prime shopping hot spots are centered in three main areas, all close to the BTS Skytrain stations, meaning that you do not have to brave the traffic. The city's huge malls are designed as easily accessible, air-conditioned shrines to consumerism. Bangkok is undoubtedly one of the best places in Asia to find quality, brand-name products and unique items. Contemporary Thai design continues to attract considerable attention around the world. Talented local designers are producing some wonderfully chic and affordable home furnishings.

Bangkok's most popular exports are its lovely silks and silk products, jewelry, celadon pottery, lacquerware, masks, carvings and antiques. Although bargaining is still the norm in the markets, the days of reducing the initial asking price by 50% are long gone. But don't worry about a language barrier: Thai vendors know their numbers in several foreign languages.

**Shopping Hours:** Generally, daily 10 am-9 or 9:30 pm. Most malls are open until 10 pm. Some smaller businesses are closed on Sunday.

## Department Stores

### Central Department Store

Chidlom Road (at Ploenchit Road, near the Chidlom BTS station)  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-793-7777

<http://www.central.co.th>

The grande dame of Bangkok department stores, Central has branches all over town. The main store at Chidlom attracts the younger, hipper Thai market. There's a good Thai crafts store on the sixth floor, a great play space for children and an excellent food court on the top floor. The Central Department Store offers tourist discount cards. For more information, see customer service.

Daily 10 am-10 pm.

### Tokyu Department Store

Th Phra Ram 1 (at Th Phayathai, National Stadium BKS station)  
Bangkok, Thailand

<http://www.mbk-center.co.th/jp/tokyu/www/index.html>

There's a walkway leading from the National Stadium BKS station into Tokyu, which is built into the Mah Boon Krong (MBK) shopping center. It's got everything you'd expect in a downtown department store and,



if the shelves there don't satisfy you, just walk into MBK—a Bangkok icon of consumerism—from the fourth floor. Brands there tend to be more down-to-earth than those at the plusher malls.

Open 10 am-9 pm.

## Factory Outlets

### Factory Outlet Villages

666 Moo 12, Nong Prue, Bang La Mung, Chonburi  
Pattaya, Thailand

On the outskirts of Bangkok is a collection of factory shops selling good-quality factory rejects, end-of-lines and discounted clothing and footwear. At the location nearest Bangkok, in Pattaya, you'll find well-known brand names that are produced in Thailand, including Clark's shoes, Dr. Martins, Gap, Columbia, Von Dutch and many more. The Outlet Villiage in Petchaburi is also notable.

### Jim Thompson Factory Outlet

153 Soi Sukhumvit 93, Bangchak, Phakanong (BTS Phakanong station)  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-332-6530

[http://www.jimthompson.com/sales\\_outlet.asp](http://www.jimthompson.com/sales_outlet.asp)

Go there for Jim Thompson original fabrics at discounted, end-of-line prices.

Daily 9 am-6 pm.

### Pasaya Textiles Outlet

25 1/2 Soi Thonglor 13, Sukhumvit 55 Road, Klongton-Nua, Wattana  
Bangkok, Thailand

<http://www.pasaya.com>

You can pick up chic and stylish bedding at outlet store prices. Pasaya is one of Thailand's leading textile manufacturers. There is a second location open daily 9:30 am-6:30 pm at Sinnsathorn Tower, second floor, Krungdhonburi Road, Klongsarn.

Daily 11 am-8 pm.

## Markets

Despite the growing number of shopping centers and malls, wet markets (meaning that the concrete floors are always wet) remain one of the most popular ways for Thais to shop. If you only have time to visit one market, it has to be J.J., as the locals affectionately term the ever-changing cluster of stalls and stands at Chatuchak Park.

### Amulet Market

Maha Rat Road (near Tha Chang pier)  
Bangkok, Thailand

The amulet market is perhaps Bangkok's most unique shopping area. Some Thais put amulets in a small plastic casing with a chain or string threaded through and wear them around their necks. They are



supposed to ward off evil spirits and bring luck. Some people, including monks, will spend a lot of time examining them to calculate their power. Visitors may find some of the amulets of Western symbols rather amusing—for example, the Playboy bunnies.

Open daily 7 am-5 pm.

## Aw Taw Kaw Talaat

Kamphaengphet Road (opposite Chatuchak Market; MRT subway Kamphaengphet station)  
Bangkok, Thailand

If you're in the area to visit Chatuchak, we recommend that you stroll through Aw Taw Kaw. It has a reputation for high-quality produce and often prices to match. There's an array of fresh fruits and vegetables, seafood, cooked food to take home, and an area to sit down and dine.

Open daily.

## Bangkok Farmers Market

Rama IV at Sukhumvit 26 (MRT subway stations Queen Sirikit National Convention Centre or Klong Toey, or BTS Phrom Phong.)  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 088-507-8694

<http://www.bkkfm.com>

Fuelling the growing interest for locally sourced and organic produce, the monthly Bangkok Farmers Market is held at K Village. There's an array of tasty treats to take home or eat there and then, as well as handmade soaps and shampoos, seeds, environmentally friendly products and much more. Also live music and entertainment for youngsters. Check the website for the schedule.

## Bo Bae

Krung Kasem Road (a 15-minute walk from Hua Lamphong railway station)  
Bangkok, Thailand

This market is famous for inexpensive garments. It is busy all day, but you will see most activity in the early morning and right before sunset when it closes. Because it is mainly a wholesale market, most products are sold by the dozen or more. It's not really a tourist market, but if you have a lot of bulk purchases to make, you won't find better prices anywhere else in Bangkok.

## Chatuchak Market

Pahonyothin Road (accessible via the Mo Chit BTS station and Kamphaengphet MRT station)  
Bangkok, Thailand

<http://www.jatujakguide.com>

Nothing rivals Chatuchak (known as J.J.) for sheer volume of regional handicrafts, real (and not-so-real) antiques, pottery, textiles, jewelry, clothes and even animals. The selection is both exhilarating and slightly daunting, especially by midafternoon when it gets crowded—there are more than 8,000 shops and stalls from which to choose. To get the most out of a Chatuchak excursion, buy a map (available at the market), go early and take breaks at the charming little cafes that are dotted throughout the market. As for buying, when you see something you like, bargain as hard as you can and buy it immediately. (You may never find your way back.)



Open Saturday and Sunday from 6 am, though many vendors don't show up until 10 am. Activity winds down between 6 and 7 pm. The plants and flowers section is also open Wednesday and Thursday 6 am-6 pm. Some sections are open during the week.

## Pratunam Market

Ratchaprarop and Phetchaburi roads (near the Amari Watergate Hotel; BTS Chidlom or Phayathai stations)  
Bangkok, Thailand

For ready-to-wear clothes at affordable prices, this is the best bet—just be prepared to bargain hard to get a reasonable price. The garments are churned out in the closed markets behind the stalls where sewing machines stay busy round-the-clock. There are also some food sellers.

## Talaat Pak Khlong

Memorial Bridge  
Bangkok, Thailand

This fascinating, bustling market has been wholesaling flowers, vegetables and fruit for more than 40 years. The riverside streets are lined with bunches of baby roses, multicolored orchids, sweet-smelling jasmine and lotus blossoms. Exploring the cavernous wooden warehouses offers a fascinating window into Thai horticulture. Be sure to watch out for delivery boys who wheel their fully loaded dollies around at breakneck speed. If you want to take fresh-cut tropical flowers home, this is the place to buy them. Highly recommended.

There's something going on 24 hours a day, but the liveliest time to go is between midnight and dawn.

## Talaat Rot Fai

Seacon Square on Sri Nagarindra Road. (BTS Udom Suk station then a taxi)  
Bangkok, Thailand

Previously located near Chatuchak, the "Railway Market" recently reopened at a new and expansive location on the outskirts of Bangkok, but it is worth the trek. Make a night of it exploring hundreds of stalls selling clothing and warehouses packed with everything from furniture and crockery to vintage cars. There are also trendy bars and restaurants.

Open Wednesday and Friday-Sunday nights 6 pm till late.

## Shopping Areas

Most shopping malls in central Bangkok offer discount cards for tourists. Inquire at the information desk with your passport.

## Asiatique

2194 Charoenkrung Road (BTS Skytrain Saphan Thaksin station, then take a free shuttle boat)  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-108-4488

<http://www.asiatiquethailand.com>

Drawing inspiration from Bangkok's historic waterfront, the open air shopping center on the banks of the Chao Phraya features more than 1,500 boutiques with fashions and accessories, gifts, crafts, retro



homewares and much more. There are also several riverfront restaurants and bars, and a huge Ferris wheel.

Daily 5 pm-midnight.

## Central World Plaza

Between Chit Lom and Siam BST stations  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-635-1111

<http://www.centralworld.co.th>

This eight-story labyrinth of commerce, Bangkok's largest shopping destination, has more than 500 shops, 100 restaurants, salons, spas and a 15-screen Cineplex. Prepare to get lost, and take your credit card.

Open 10 am-10 pm.

## Mah Boon Krong Center

Phayathai Road (at Rama I Road, National Stadium BTS station)  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-620-9000

<http://www.mbk-center.co.th/en/home/index.php>

Visit the wildly popular Mah Boon Krong (MBK) if you want to check out the future generation of Thai leaders (it's adjacent to a university). It's a six-story maze that strikes us as chaotic. Nonetheless, MBK offers great deals on fake designer-label merchandise and everything you'd ever want in the way of cell phone paraphernalia. It is attached to Tokyu Department Store, and there is a cinema up top.

Daily 10 am-10 pm.

## Pantip Plaza

New Petchburi Road (between Phayathai and Ratchaparop roads)  
Bangkok, Thailand

<http://www.pantiplaza.com>

This is the ultimate source for electronics—a five-story mall with shops selling computers and related gear. It is also stacked full of pirated software, DVDs and CDs for as little as 100 baht a disc. Take a taxi or catch the BTS to Ratchathewi—it's a 10-minute walk from there.

Most shops are open daily 10 am-10 pm.

## Siam Center

Rama 1 Road (BTS Skytrain Siam station)  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-2658-1000

<http://www.siamcenter.co.th>

Revamped in 2013, Siam Center is home to more than 200 fashion boutiques, many by leading Thai designers. There are also multimedia and tech stores, leading international brands, and cool cafes.



## Siam Paragon

991 Rama I Road (between Phya Thai and Rajprasong roads; it can be accessed directly from the Siam BTS station)  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 09-690-1000

<http://www.siamparagon.co.th>

If you are looking for quality goods, go to Siam Paragon—all the top brand names have outlets there. It also houses the Paragon Gourmet Market and Food Hall, which covers 215,278 sq ft/20,000 sq m of the ground floor. The upper floors also have good restaurants, including a Blue Elephant outlet. Ocean World aquarium, the largest in Asia, is on the lower ground floor. The entertainment zone also includes The Paragon Cinepolis, The Siam Opera and the Royal Paragon Hall.

Open daily 10 am-10 pm.

## The Emporium

622 Sukhumvit Soi 24 (take the walkway from Phrom Phong BTS station)

Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-260-1000, ext. 1726

<http://www.emporiumthailand.com>

This elegant mall not only showcases popular trends, but also helps create them. You'll find lots of stores focused on interior-design items and furnishings. Seamlessly blending consumerism with entertainment, the Emporium also plays an important cultural role for the city: It's used for fashion shows, book signings, concerts and film festivals.

Daily 10 am-10 pm.

## Specialty Stores

Bangkok is a great place to have clothes made, sometimes at a fraction of the normal cost, especially if you provide your own material. Many of the major hotels have tailor shops working within or adjacent to their premises. If you want your favorite piece of clothing copied, be prepared to leave it at the shop while the work is being carried out. If you want to have a suit made, have several fittings to be sure they've got it right. Beware of shops that offer incredible deals (for example, three suits ready in two days) and check around before you commit yourself.

If you buy material from a shop, make sure you're getting what you ask for: Some shops have been known to sell a polyester blend as cotton. Most tailors will request a sizable deposit. Other foreigners have been scammed by placing orders (and advance payments) with tailor shops that fail to deliver on the finished product.

The following tailors have good reputations: Siam Emporium, third floor Siam Center (phone 02-251-9617; <http://www.siamemporium.net>); Queen Thai Silk, Ruamchitt Plaza, 199 Sukhumvit Road, near Soi 15 (between Nana and Asoke BTS stations); and Peter Armani, 1/3 Sukhumvit Soi 11 (phone 02-255-7949).

Hours and opening days for shops can vary; call ahead to make sure the store you wish to visit is open.



## Almeta Silk

20/3 Sukhumvit Road Soi 23  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-204-1413 or 02-258-4227

<http://www.almeta.com>

Very personal store with a fabulous selection of flowing plain or patterned silks in literally thousands of colors, from "golden shades of raw sugar" to iridescent "strong lotus colors," all handwoven to order. Take your measurements, choose among four different thread types (*buoy* yarn silk being the finest and shiniest) and weights, combine the desired colors and return a few days later to pick up. No minimum order required. It does silk embroidery, including clients' personal logos, and will even treat the silk fabrics to be machine-washable if requested.

Daily 10 am-6 pm.

## Jim Thompson's Thai Silk Shop

9 Surawong Road (BTS station Sala Daeng)  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-632-8100

<http://www.jimthompson.com>

This is probably the most famous and reputable silk shop in Thailand—but also the most expensive one. The shop bears the name of the man who revived the silk industry in Thailand in the 1950s and '60s. In addition to this flagship location, which has the largest selection of fabrics, branches can be found in most upscale hotels and malls, and at the Jim Thompson House Museum.

Daily 9 am-9 pm.

## Karmakamet

Central World Plaza  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-613-1397

<http://www.karmakamet.co.th>

The shop looks like a traditional Thai pharmacy and will charm your olfactory sense with perfumes, pure and blended essential oils, aromatic candles, traditional incense sticks, perfume sachets and aromatic moisturizing soaps. There is a second location at Chatuchak Market (Section 2, Soi 3).

## Narai Phand

973 Ploenchit Road, Lumpini  
Bangkok, Thailand 10330

**Phone:** 02-6560-3989

<http://www.naraiphand.com>

This joint venture between The Ministry of Industry and the private sector has created the largest center for Thai handicrafts, with four levels of shopping.

Daily 11 am-8 pm.



## Nittaya Curry Shop

136-40 Th Chakraphong, Banglamphu  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-976-1600 or 02-282-8212

<http://www.nittayathaicurry.com>

Nittaya's world-famous pungent curry pastes are a delight for everyone who wants to try a hand at Thai cuisine back home. The curries are sold at almost all Thai food retailers or by order. Choose among red curry, green curry, panang paste, yellow curry (Indian style) and chili in oil. Nittaya also stocks spicy sauces, tamarind paste, dried chili and palm sugar.

Daily 10 am-6 pm.

## Old Maps & Prints

River City Complex, Thanon Yotha, Bangrak (Fourth Floor; BTS Skytrain Saphan Thaksin station)  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-2370-0778

<http://www.classicmaps.com>

Beautiful historical charts and rare hand-colored engravings, with lots of old prints of Siam, Laos, Cambodia, Burma, Vietnam, Malaysia and Singapore. Check out splendid views of Ayutthaya or Angkor Wat.

Daily 11 am-7 pm.

## Tamnan Mingmuang

Thaniya Plaza (Third Floor; east end of Soi Thaniya, Thanon Silom; BTS Skytrain Sala Daeng station)  
Bangkok, Thailand

Carved coconuts, bambooware and beautiful baskets, lampshades, trays, betel-nut boxes, and handbags intricately woven in rattan, wild grass, water hyacinth and the ultrafine and fernlike *yan lipao* vine.

Daily 11 am-8 pm.

## Zud Rang Ma Records

7/1 Sukhumvit 51 (BTS Thonglor station)  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 088-891-1314

<http://www.zudrangmarecords.com>

Lovers of world music can discover original and reissued vinyl records of Thai stars. There is a large collection of northeastern Thai *mor lam* and *luk thung* music, and much more.

Open daily except Monday 2-9 pm.





## Dining

### Dining Overview

From food stalls on the street (where you can buy a bowl of fish balls and noodles or a dish of rice and red curry for 30 baht) to haute cuisine restaurants (which may serve fixed-price French meals for 2,500 baht), Bangkok has something to please the palate every day of the week.

The culinary scene in Bangkok has undergone a remarkable transformation. Once famed for its delicious street food and thousands of Thai restaurants, the city now offers a bewildering choice of world cuisines, making it one of the best cities in Asia for dining out. So if you tire of the many different ways Thais serve food, you'll never be at a loss. Bangkok has some first-rate French and Italian restaurants, as well as Japanese, Korean and Indian.

You may notice Thais seem to eat constantly: snacking on fruit, nibbling a piece of grilled chicken bought from a street vendor. So there's ample opportunity to satisfy hunger cravings throughout the day until late in the evening. In general, Thais eat lunch 11:30 am-1 pm (you'll see the mass exodus from office buildings) and dinner sometime between 6 and 9 pm.

You'll be missing out if you don't taste such local specialties as the famous *tom yam kung*, a hot-and-sour prawn soup, and pad thai (Thai fried noodles). Aficionados have been known to dedicate their entire holiday to hunting for the tastiest versions of these dishes. There's also the full range of Thai curries (*gaeng*)—red, green and yellow—and stir-fried dishes of pork, chicken or shrimp with basil and garlic. And that's for beginners.

Stay long enough and you'll find yourself savoring dishes such as *laap* (chopped meat with herbs and spices) and *som tam* (a flavorful and highly seasoned green papaya salad with dried shrimp).

Many Thai dishes make use of the *phrik* (a chili) and even the explosively hot pepper *phrik khii nuu*. But have no fear: Thais have become so used to the average foreigner's suspicion of chili that they tend to reduce the chili content automatically. In the better restaurants, you can ask for your dish *mai phet* (not spicy), and they'll reduce the spice for you.

But don't dismiss the entire cuisine if you bite into a hot chili. There are plenty of Thai dishes that don't use lots of chili and rely on aromatic herbs and grasses such as fresh coriander, lemongrass, Kaffir lime and tamarind for flavor.

*BK Magazine* prints an annual list of all the hot new restaurants. <http://bk.asia-city.com/restaurants>.

Expect to pay within these general guidelines, based on the cost of a dinner for one and not including drinks, tax or tip: \$ = less than 250 baht; \$\$ = 250 baht-500 baht; \$\$\$ = 501 baht-1,500 baht; and \$\$\$\$ = more than 1,500 baht.



## Local & Regional

### Ban Chiang

14 Soi Sri Wiang, Surasak Road (between Silom and Sathorn roads, near Surasak BTS station)  
Bangkok, Thailand 10500

**Phone:** 02-236-7045

<http://www.banchiangthairestaurant.com>

This place serves Thai cuisine mainly to a Western clientele in a traditional Thai wooden house, with a choice of seating indoors (elegant atmosphere and air-conditioning) or outdoors (in a leafy garden, where greenery screens each table). Try the excellent eggplant salad and red curry, whose spices are restrained and well-balanced.

Daily for lunch and dinner. \$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

### basil

250 Sukhumvit Road (near Asoke BTS and Asoke MRT stations)  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-649-8366

<http://www.sheratongrandesukhumvit.com>

This chic restaurant in the Sheraton Grande Sukhumvit features contemporary Thai decor and authentic Thai cuisine. The *gaeng kiew wan nue khao tod*, green curry with Angus beef and deep-fried jasmine rice, is a perfect example of a traditional dish presented with creative, contemporary flair. Lovers of seafood will not be disappointed—the *choochee pla* salmon, pan-fried salmon in a rich red-curry sauce, is a standout favorite.

Daily for lunch and dinner; the Sunday "Jazzy Brunch Buffet" (11:30 am-3 pm) is highly recommended. \$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

### Blue Elephant

233 S. Sathorn Road (near Surasak BTS station)  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-673-9353

<http://www.blueelephant.com>

This Thai restaurant chain was started in Brussels by the Thai wife of a Belgian antiques dealer as a way to entertain his customers. Her experience has brought items into the menu not normally seen in Thai restaurants—the foie gras with tamarind is a must-try. This style of Thai cuisine is more compatible with wine than most. After your meal, relax in the Blue Bar for a cocktail.

Daily for lunch and dinner. \$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.



## Bo.Lan

42 Soi Pichai Ronnarong Songkram, Sukhumvit 26 (BTS Skytrain Phrom Phong station)  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-260-2962

<http://www.bolan.co.th>

Thai and western owners Bo and Dylan formerly worked at David Thompson's Michelin-starred Thai restaurant Nahm. They serve authentic Thai cuisine. Choose from the a la carte menu or the Bo.Lan Balance set menu, which changes every two months and includes five bite-size appetizers, followed by four entrees to share with a soup of your choice. Expect flavorful food, fancy presentation and a largely Western clientele.

Open daily except Monday for dinner. \$\$\$\$.

## Bua

1/4 Convent Road, Silom (a short walk from the Sala Daeng BTS station)  
Bangkok, Thailand

This is an extremely popular Thai restaurant that attracts a mix of locals and foreigners. The extensive menu includes appetizers, salads, soup and seafood from all four of Thailand's culinary regions. Tasty food and a relaxed atmosphere for an excellent value.

\$\$ . Most major credit cards.

## Chote Chitr

146 Phrang Phu Torn Tanao Road (south of Banglamphu; MRT Hualampong station)  
Bangkok, Thailand

Not many tourists find their way to this small and inexpensive eatery, which serves some of the greatest traditional central-Thai food in the city, playing around with time-honored family recipes. Food is served on only five teakwood tables in a single, small room. Owner and chef Khun Tim swings between charming and chilling, but speaks English well. Try her signature dish *yam hua plee*, a shredded banana-flower salad with coconut cream, toasted dried chillies, black sesame, crisp fried shallots, shrimp and chicken. The menu is impressive and everything is a delight.

Daily for lunch and dinner. \$\$ . No credit cards.

## Hemlock

56 Phra Athit Road, Banglamphu  
Bangkok, Thailand

This small, hip restaurant with whitewashed walls and a rock-strewn interior—a hit with Bangkok's young, artsy crowd—serves eclectic and inexpensive Thai dishes such as banana-flower salad and spicy *miang kham* (wild tea leaves wrapped around roasted peanuts, dried shrimp, grated coconut and other flavorful ingredients). Check out the exhibitions and performances upstairs.

Daily for dinner, bar open until late. Reservations recommended on Friday and Saturday. \$-\$\$ . No credit cards.



## Issaya Siamese Club

4 Soi Sri Aksorn, Chua Poeng Road, Sathorn  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-672-9040

<http://www.issaya.com>

The Issaya has many interesting facets. It is the first restaurant opened by Ian Kittichai, Thailand's international celebrity chef, and the building itself is basically a residential house. There are even bean bags spread out on the front lawn for those customers wanting to relax in the sun. It serves very spicy Thai fare, such as the spicy pork belly in Northern-style curry, and also offers a weekend tea and Sunday brunch. The ever-changing market menu has dishes made from fresh produce bought from the farmers market that same day. We insist that you try one of his signature desserts, such as the creme brulee.

Daily for lunch, dinner and late-night; Sunday for brunch also. \$\$\$\$ . Most major credit cards.

## Mahanaga

2 Sukhumvit Soi 29 (near Phrom Phong BTS station)  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-662-3060

<http://www.mahanaga.com>

Thai fusion works like a charm in this top-end restaurant. Diners can eat inside or in the garden. Of special note are the *panaeng ped lychee* duck breast with lychee in a peanut curry sauce and *hoy shell pad cha* scallops with yellow chili on noodles. The menu is complemented by an exhaustive wine list.

Daily for lunch and dinner. Reservations recommended for dinner. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$ . Most major credit cards.

## Nahm

Ground Floor, Metropolitan, Sathorn Tai Bangkok (MRT subway Lumpini station or BTS Skytrain Chong Nonsi station)  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-625-3333

<http://www.comohotels.com/metropolitanbangkok/dining/nahm>

Australian chef David Thompson's Thai food has received both high praise and criticism from locals and foreigners alike. There's a good set menu with a choice of appetizers, soups and curries.

Open Monday-Friday for lunch and dinner, Saturday and Sunday for dinner only. \$\$\$\$ .

## Paste

120/6 Sukhumvit Soi 49  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-392-4313

<http://pastebangkok.com>

Thai-and-Western couple Bongkoch Satongun, who used to work at Blue Elephant, and Jason Bailey use modern techniques and creative presentation to serve up their distinctive take on Thai food in this small



shophouse restaurant. The emphasis is on fresh, locally sourced seasonal produce that results in dishes bursting with flavor.

Open Tuesday for dinner only, Wednesday-Sunday for lunch and dinner. \$\$\$.

## Tor Um Tum

Sukhumvit Soi 61 (BTS Skytrain Ekkamai station)  
Bangkok, Thailand

This trendy restaurant serves northeastern Thai food. It attracts a young crowd who tuck into classics such as *som tam Thai* (papaya salad), and *laab ped* (spicy minced duck salad).

Daily for lunch and dinner.

## Vientiane Kitchen

8 Sukhumvit Soi 36 (near Thonglor BTS station)  
Bangkok, Thailand

An atmospheric country-style restaurant in the heart of Bangkok, Vientiane Kitchen serves northeastern (Issan) Thai and Lao food. Isaan cuisine is not for the unadventurous, but fortunately there are plenty of offerings for those who don't fancy ant-egg curry or live baby prawns. The food can be spicy, but don't shy away from trying some of the more curious menu items. Nightly traditional music performances add to an already excellent atmosphere.

Daily for lunch and dinner. \$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

## Cuisines

### American

#### 25 Degrees

Pullman Bangkok Hotel G, 37th Floor, 188 Silom Road (BTS Skytrain Chong Nonsi station)  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-238-1991

<http://www.pullmanbangkokhotelg.com>

The sister venue of the Los Angeles burger and wine bar is named after the precise temperature difference between a raw and well-done hamburger. This cool venue updates the traditional American burger bar concept with funky music and decor. Burgers are served in a split brown paper bag. Go for one of the many menu options or build your own from an array of ingredients.

Open daily for lunch and dinner. \$\$\$.



## Mediterranean

### Aldo's Mediterranean Bistro and Wine Bar

The Ascott Sathorn Bangkok, Level 7, 187 S. Sathorn Road, Yannawa, Sathorn (BTS Skytrain Chong Nonsi station) Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-676-6969

<http://www.cascadeclubandspa.com>

If you are passionate about food and your health, Aldo's Mediterranean Bistro and Wine Bar is one of the best places to dine in the city. This sophisticated poolside restaurant and bar is part of the Cascade Club, a prestigious, purpose-built health and lifestyle club in Bangkok's central business district, but you don't have to be a member to enjoy Aldo's fine food and wine. Diners can choose to eat in air-conditioned comfort or outside in one of the poolside *sala* pavilions.

Daily for lunch and dinner. \$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

### Sirocco and Sky Bar

1055 Silom Road, Silom Bank Rak (in Le Bua at State Tower Hotel, 63rd Floor; BTS Saphan Thaksin station) Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 2624-9555

<http://www.lebua.com/en/the-dome-dining/sirocco-restaurant>

Located in the Dome at Le Bua in the State Tower Hotel, Sirocco is widely heralded as one of the city's finest restaurants, with a breathtaking view and sumptuous Mediterranean menu to match. There's also live classical jazz in the evenings daily except Monday.

Daily 6 pm-1 am.

## Seafood

### Lord Jim's

48 Oriental Ave. (in the Oriental Bangkok; near Saphan Taksin BTS station; take the hotel shuttle boat) Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-659-9000, ext. 76801

[http://www.mandarinoriental.com/bangkok/dining/restaurants/lord\\_jims](http://www.mandarinoriental.com/bangkok/dining/restaurants/lord_jims)

Named for the novel by Joseph Conrad, this restaurant is a Bangkok classic. Overlooking the Chao Phraya River, where Conrad anchored his ship, the restaurant offers fresh seafood and sushi.

Daily for lunch and dinner. \$\$\$.

### Seafood Market

89 Sukhumvit Soi 24 (near Phrom Phong BTS station) Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-2612-0715

<http://www.seafood.co.th>



"If it swims, we have it" is the slogan of this massive seafood eating hall buried in the bowels of Sukhumvit. Unlike traditional a-la-carte restaurants, there you shop as you would in a supermarket (with a cart), and then they cook your choices for you. The range of seafood truly is spectacular and the standards very high. The crab claws are amazing. It's popular with Japanese visitors in particular, and prices are a tad higher than elsewhere.

\$\$-\$\$\$.

## Somboon Seafood

169/7-12 Surawong Road (BTS Skytrain Chong Nonsi station)

Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-233-3104

<http://www.somboonseafood.com>

This place is always busy and particularly popular with Asian tourists. Its star dish is the famous yellow curry crab. Good service, crowded, noisy, delicious. Five locations in Bangkok.

Daily for dinner. \$\$\$.

## Supatra River House

266 Soi Wat Rakhang, Arun Amrin Road

Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-411-0305

<http://www.supatrariverhouse.net>

This place is noted for fabulous Chao Phraya views from the terrace, which looks across to the glowing spires of the Grand Palace. The menu is filled with Thai seafood dishes—all of which are presented beautifully. On weekends, the Patravadi Theater's traditional Thai dancers perform. (By far, they are the most authentic and professional troupe in town.) If you call in advance, a small boat can pick you up from Central Pier.

Daily for lunch and dinner. \$\$\$.

## Yok Yor

Klong San 762 Lard Yar, Klong San

Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-437-1121

<http://www.yokyor.co.th>

Seafood chain Yok Yor has two riverside properties along with a dinner cruise option, but the best one is the Klong San restaurant (on the "other" side of the river, meaning you can take in a splendid view of the Bangkok skyline while enjoying terrific seafood). Very popular with Thais, the food is authentic and certainly not toned down for a foreign palate.

Open daily for dinner and late night. \$-\$\$.



## Steak Houses

### Madison

155 Rajadamri Road (in the Four Seasons Bangkok; near Rajadamri BTS station)  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-126-8866, ext 1231

<http://www.fourseasons.com/bangkok/dining/restaurants/madison>

There is a sense of welcoming warmth enhanced by the open fireplace when you walk into this restaurant. The steak house provides a comfortable dining experience with attentive service. Black Angus Argentinean, Australian and Kobe beef are served, as well as quality seafood.

Daily for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Reservations for Sunday brunch should be made one week in advance. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

### New York Steakhouse

4 Sukhumvit Soi 2 (JW Marriott, Second Floor; near Pholenchit BTS station)  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-656-7700

<http://www.marriott.com/hotels/hotel-information/restaurant/bkkdt-jw-marriott-hotel-bangkok>

The first thing that you notice is that everything is big, black and clubby, with wingback chairs at the tables. Before dinner, try one of the 19 martinis on the menu. This place has the finest and largest steaks in town—some too big to finish: The 16-oz/450-g New York strip loin is, quite simply, a monster.

Nightly for dinner only. Reservations required. Smart dress code. \$\$\$\$ . Most major credit cards.

### Prime

123 Chareonnakorn Road (in the Millennium Hilton Bangkok)  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 02-442-2000

<http://www3.hilton.com/en/hotels/thailand/millennium-hilton-bangkok-hotel-BKKHITW/dining/index.html>

Prime is regarded as one of the best steakhouses in Bangkok. It serves the finest imported beef, fresh lobster and oysters. The decor is chic and the views across the river superb. Seafood and salads are available, including a Caesar salad prepared tableside. An excellent wine list complements the fine food.

Open daily for dinner. Reservations recommended. \$\$\$\$ . Most major credit cards.

## Dinner Cruises

### Manohra

555/8137 Pratunam Center, Room 2137, Rajprarop  
Bangkok, Thailand

**Phone:** 080-065-1739

<http://www.manohracruise.com>





Enjoy a meal while floating down the Chao Phraya River on a traditional rice barge. The set menu of Thai food is geared mainly to tourists—too sweet, with too little heat and spice—but the experience is worth it. Operated by the Marriott, the boat departs from the hotel at 7:30 pm and returns at 10:30 pm. You can be dropped off at any public pier on the return trip.

Reservations required. \$\$\$\$ . Most major credit cards.

## Other Options

### DID-Dine in the Dark

The Ascott Hotel, Second Floor, Sathorn Road (BTS Skytrain Chong Nonsi station)  
Bangkok, Thailand

A fine-dining experience that deprives you of sight to heighten your other senses. Choose between meat, seafood or vegetarian options, and then dine in darkness. Staff are all visually impaired. Set three-course menus. 10% of profits go to help the visually impaired in Bangkok.

Daily for dinner. \$\$.

### Sriyan Food Market

Thanon Sriyan, Dusit (just off Samsen Road)  
Bangkok, Thailand

This huge daily food market, which goes all the way down both sides of Thanon Sriyan, sells nothing but Thai food at very cheap prices. There, you can buy green curry—which you will have to take away in a plastic bag—for 40 baht, or sit down on the chairs at the stall for rice soup. It is like Chinatown, except there are virtually no tourists. To get there, catch a taxi boat to Pier 18 (45 minutes from the central pier).

## Security

### Etiquette

Thailand is justifiably called the Land of Smiles. The famous Thai smile goes with the all-important concept of *mai pen rai* (roughly translated as "never mind"). Rather than exhibiting anger, a Thai will smile and say *mai pen rai* in response to almost every uncomfortable social situation. Foreigners may not even know that they have done or said something offensive.

The concept of the heart (*jai*) is just as important. Thais place great value on maintaining a cool and calm heart (called *jai yen*). Foreigners who display strong emotions (anger, impatience or even extreme happiness) are considered to have *jai rawn* (a hot heart), and their standing will diminish in the eyes of their Thai hosts. Politeness and courtesy are highly valued, and public displays of emotion should be avoided.

The head is the highest and most sacred part of the body. The foot is the lowest. It's considered extremely rude to touch a Thai on the head, and never touch or point at anyone with your foot. Don't sit with your feet pointed at a Thai, as it is a sign of gross disrespect. And never put your feet up on a chair or table. Never point the soles of your feet towards a Buddha, especially when visiting temples, and be sure to remove your shoes before entering temples, homes and even some shops and guesthouses.



Thais usually greet each other by placing their hands together, palms touching and held close to the body between the face and the chest. This form of greeting is called a *wai* and is often accompanied by a slight bow. Given a *wai*, one replies in kind (although you should never *wai* someone who is providing a service, such as a server or a taxi driver). Sometimes it's difficult for visitors to discern the appropriate times to *wai*. When in doubt, use our rule of thumb: It's always safer to respond to a *wai* than to initiate one.

Personal cleanliness and appearance can make a big impression. Thais are puzzled by the fact that although many Westerners are wealthy, young Western tourists often dress in ragged and wrinkled clothes.

One aspect of Thai taboo, in which Westerners make unwitting gaffes, is uttering anything critical of Buddhism (or monks) and the monarchy. It is actually illegal in Thailand to say or write anything derogatory of the religion or the monarchy—doing so, even for a foreigner, can result in a long prison sentence. If you criticize or dismiss anything on these subjects, you will make any Thais present deeply uncomfortable, and they are likely to ostracize you in the future. Likewise, women should not touch monks or sit next to them on buses; when a Thai woman needs to speak to a monk, she kneels down in front of him and keeps a conscious social distance.

## Personal Safety

Overall, Thailand is fairly safe. Most crime is committed among locals, but travelers should take basic precautions to avoid becoming victims. Don't wear expensive jewelry or watches when touring, especially after dark. Beware of pickpockets on overcrowded public transportation and in high-traffic tourist areas—the lower end of Sukhumvit Road (around the Nana BTS station) is notorious for pickpockets. Cell phone thievery has been increasing, as have violent crimes and muggings. There have been a few daring raids on buses, and lone travelers have been mugged crossing overhead pedestrian passes. Drive-by bag snatches by motorcyclists have become increasingly common, so beware when walking on side streets. Err on the side of caution—at night, for example, try to stay in well-lit areas.

However, the biggest threats come from motorists who never yield to pedestrians and from smiling con artists who hang around the major tourist attractions (Westerners are the targets of numerous scams, and it's wise to be aware of your surroundings to avoid becoming a victim). Disregard *tuk-tuk* drivers and other chatty folk who tell you that an attraction, usually a temple, is closed today: They're hoping to take you on a shopping tour to places where you'll most assuredly be ripped off—be especially wary of gem stores. In general, anyone paying you undue attention or appealing for money should be treated with suspicion. Avoid answering questions about where you are going or staying, and avoid *tuk tuk* drivers who offer low fares in exchange for just "one stop." This quick stop often turns into a high-pressured sales pitch at a shop where he collects a hefty commission.

Be wary of strangers offering you food or drink. Although uncommon, there have been reports of visitors being drugged and robbed or worse. This is more likely to happen in the seedier parts of town, so stay alert if you're in a red-light district. Buying drinks in Pat Pong's sleazier clubs, especially for any of the working girls, often comes with a hefty bar tab. Bars on the upper floors are notorious for rip-offs. The golden rule is stay in bars on the ground floor.

Don't buy drugs, which are readily available in Bangkok. Thailand forcefully prosecutes foreigners. Drug consumption is taken seriously in Thailand, and in Bangkok the police even mount highly publicized raids on clubs and force everyone inside to submit to a drug test. In the backpacker area of Khao San, the police regularly stop and search Westerners for drugs. Those who are caught might go free if they pay a



huge bribe (the police will empty their bank accounts), but they are more likely to end up languishing in a Thai prison. The prisons are filled with drug offenders.

If anything goes wrong, phone 1155 to contact the Tourist Police. For the latest information, contact your country's travel-advisory agency.

## Health

Hepatitis A vaccines, obtained at least two weeks before departure, are recommended for travelers. Typhoid vaccines are also a good idea for adventurous eaters who plan to dine outside the five-star restaurant circuit. Visitors should also be up-to-date on tetanus and MMR vaccines.

As long as you take some reasonable precautions, trying the local food should pose no problems other than an occasional bout of diarrhea. If the restaurant looks clean and well-run, chances are the food is safe. In general, try to eat at places that are busy, because the food is being cooked and eaten quickly, not left sitting around.

Salads, fruits and vegetables should be washed with purified water or peeled. The same common sense applies when buying food from street vendors. Fortunately, you can usually watch the food being cooked and decide if something doesn't look as fresh as it should.

The better hotels have water-filtration systems, and restaurants typically serve bottled water. We recommend that you stick with bottled water: It's inexpensive and readily available (make sure the cap seal hasn't been broken). Some areas around the center have reverse-osmosis machines that can purify tap water. It doesn't come out cold, but you can always store it in the fridge in your hotel room. Ice cubes are generally made from treated water, but crushed ice from street vendors may be problematic and should be avoided.

HIV/AIDS is a concern in Bangkok, as it is elsewhere in the world. The Thai government has launched many awareness and prevention programs, and the rate of infection seems to be under control.

Malaria isn't really a problem in Bangkok, but Thailand's jungle areas, including the Burmese and Laos border areas and forested parts of Phang Nga and Phuket, do pose some malarial risk. Cases of dengue fever outbreaks rise during the rainy season. Don't forget the insect repellent. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is a good resource for anyone planning to visit these areas, and can provide the latest vaccine and health recommendations. The CDC malaria hotline can be reached by calling 770-488-7100. <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/thailand.htm>.

If you need hospital care while in Bangkok, the city has several excellent hospitals. Most of them have medical staff members who speak English, the standards are very good, and they are remarkably inexpensive. Bumrungrad Hospital on Sukhumvit 3 (phone 02-667-1000; <http://www.bumrungrad.com/thailandhospital>) and Samitivej Hospital on Sukhumvit 49 (phone 02-711-8181; <http://www.samitivejhospitals.com/Sukhumvit/en>) are the best for travelers. A favorite for expats is BNH Hospital (formerly Bangkok Nursing Home) on Convent Road where it intersects with Silom Road (phone 02-686-2700; <http://www.bnhhospital.com>). The dental hospital on Sukhumvit 49 is best for foreigners needing dental work (phone 02-711-8181; <http://www.dentalhospitalbangkok.com>).

Pharmacies are plentiful in Bangkok, including a British pharmacy chain called Boots and an Asian chain called Watsons. Most pharmacists around the city center and in the shopping malls speak English.



## Disabled Advisory

There is little in the way of maps or information services in Bangkok detailing access for the disabled. It's a very difficult city to get around, because sidewalks are uneven, potholed, torn up or occupied by vehicles and street vendors. The road surface down the *sois* is far smoother. Some hotels provide wheelchair-accessible rooms (don't expect them to be truly accessible by Western definitions, however). For the best facilities, it is best to book with international chains, which are mostly located in the central districts. Most major shopping centers have basic wheelchair access, but elevators tend to be small and crowded, and it's obvious that hallways weren't designed with wheelchairs in mind.

The government has pledged to make the city more wheelchair-accessible, and there are plans to improve the pavements at Siam Square and other busy areas. For up-to-date information, visit the Disabled People's International Asia Pacific Region website. <http://www.dpiap.org>.

Taxis are still the best option for disabled travelers and anyone with limited mobility. The metro is the best mode of public transportation for wheelchairs, as each station has an elevator and trains come with locks for wheelchairs.

Unfortunately, wheelchairs are not accommodated in buses, boat taxis or regular trains. The Skytrain has elevators at some stations, including Chong Nonsi, Krung Thon Buri, Wongwan Yai, On Nut, Mo Chit and Siam. Others require passengers to climb a steep flight of stairs to the platform. However, there is a wide, elevated walkway between the National Stadium and Chitlom stations, with the Siam Square station in between, that connects all the major shopping malls in the area. There are also plans to build a 31-mi/50-km superwalkway across the city, but this will not be completed until at least 2017. The airport link rail station is equipped with ramps and lifts for disabled travelers. It's also useful for travelers with lots of luggage.

Help & Care Travel Company offers wheelchair-accessible tour packages, transportation and personal assistants. It is registered with the Tourism Authority of Thailand. Phone 02-720-5395. <http://www.wheelchairtours.com>.

Wheel Adventure is a travel blog written from the perspective of a wheelchair user and includes helpful information about transport and wheelchair-accessible nightlife. [http://wheeladventure.com/WA\\_Destinations/WA\\_AsiaDn/WA\\_BangkokDn/index.htm](http://wheeladventure.com/WA_Destinations/WA_AsiaDn/WA_BangkokDn/index.htm).

Some of the newer attractions, such as the Museum of Contemporary art and the Bangkok Art and Culture Centre, are not only accessible, but also offer free entry for people with disabilities.

Your best sources of information are likely accessibility organizations and specialist travel organizations in your home country

## Facts

### Dos & Don'ts

Do smile even if you are stuck in an unpleasant situation. It's the quickest way to resolve a misunderstanding.

Don't lose your patience or show any form of anger. Talking too loudly is regarded as impolite behavior.



Don't sunbathe naked. Thais are modest people.

Do carry some form of identification with a photo. Foreigners are required to carry their passports at all times. This is rarely enforced, but it is the law. If you are uncomfortable doing this, carry a photocopy of your passport.

Don't step on a Thai banknote. It's illegal because the notes bear the image of the king of Thailand.

Do dress conservatively in temples. Short trousers or skirts and shirts that expose the shoulders are not acceptable. Always remove your shoes when entering the inner area of a temple.

Don't climb on Buddha sculptures to take photographs.

Do show respect for the Thai royal family. Thai people have deep respect for the monarch, and disrespect for the royal family is a criminal offense taken very seriously.

Don't get involved with drugs. Penalties for drug offenses are severe in Thailand.

Do remove your shoes before entering houses, temples and some shops.

Do learn a few basic Thai phrases; they're easy to pronounce and a simple way to return some of the warmth you'll encounter in the land of smiles (*sa-wat-dee* means "hello," *kob khun* means "thank you," *mai-pen-rai* means "no, thanks," and *lar-karn* means "goodbye").

## Geostats

**Passport/Visa Requirements:** All tourists must possess passports valid for at least six months longer than their intended stay in Thailand and with at least one empty visa page. If their stay will not exceed 30 days, citizens of Canada and the U.S. do not need to obtain a visa ahead of time; instead, they receive a 30-day entry permit stamp on arrival if they arrive by air; arrivals by land border crossing are granted 15-day entry only.

Thai tourist visas can be arranged at any Thai embassy or consulate for a processing fee of US\$40 per entry. They allow 60-day stays in the Kingdom regardless of entry point. Proof of onward passage is officially required, but customs officers rarely check. The visa, which must be used within 90 days of issue, may be extended twice for 30 days each at 1,900 baht per extension.

Visitors from countries qualifying for visas on arrival can apply for a visa for a period not exceeding 15 days for a fee of 1,000 baht. People from these countries can only apply for an visa extension under special circumstances such as illness.

"Visa runs," or day trips into a neighboring country for the purpose of obtaining a new visa upon arrival, are common. Popular runs include Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar and Malaysia. Some countries charge a small fee—Myanmar, for example, charges 500 baht. Check the amount before you leave.

The 30-day entry permit stamp on arrival can only be extended for seven days for 1,900 baht at the Immigration Bureau Office at Building B, Government Centre, Chaeng Wattana Road Soi 7, Laksi, Bangkok. Open Monday-Friday 8:30 am-noon and 1-4:30 pm. Phone 02-287-3101-10, or 1178 for the call center. <http://www.immigration.go.th>.



Consult the Thai Immigration Bureau for additional information and locations. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs website also publishes the latest visa information for U.S. citizens.  
<http://www.mfa.go.th/web/12.php>.

A departure tax of 700 baht for international flights is included in your ticket price. Reconfirm travel document requirements with your carrier before departure.

**Population:** 8,426,080.

**Languages:** Thai. English is spoken in tourist areas and at business meetings. Many signs of relevance to travelers are also in English.

**Predominant Religions:** Buddhism, Islam.

**Time Zone:** 7 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (+7 GMT). Daylight Saving Time is not observed.

**Voltage Requirements:** 220 volts. There are several types of plugs and sockets in use, so travelers with electric shavers and other appliances should take an adapter or plan to buy one (readily available) upon arrival in Thailand.

**Telephone Codes:** 66, country code; 02, city code;

## Money

### Currency Exchange

Thailand's currency is the baht. There are 100 satang to one baht. Coins are used in denominations of 25 satang, 50 satang, 1 baht, 2 baht, 5 baht and 10 baht. Bank note denominations comprise 20 baht, 50 baht, 100 baht, 500 baht and 1,000 baht. The satang coins are virtually worthless today and rarely seen.

Banks and currency-exchange booths, particularly Forex booths, are in all major tourist areas. Both will issue cash advances on your Visa or MasterCard. (Be sure to take the carbon paper if any is used for the transaction.) Traveler's checks are also widely accepted.

ATMs are located outside convenience stores, banks and shopping areas. Most ATMs are connected to international banking systems. The ATMs charge 150 baht with each withdrawal and allow 20,000 baht to be taken out per day. ATMs at some of the major banks have 24-hour service. Hotels will change money around the clock, but the rates won't be as good.

Taxi drivers and street vendors rarely have change for 500 baht or 1,000 baht notes, so it's best to have a good supply of change. However, 7-Eleven shops will usually give change for 1,000 baht notes if you buy something small. Major credit cards can be used in most upmarket shops and high-quality restaurants, but sometimes they will charge a small fee of around 3% or more (they will tell you if this is the case). Most smaller businesses insist on cash payments.

## Taxes

Visitors to Thailand can claim VAT (value-added tax) refunds at Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Hat Yai and Phuket international airports. The conditions stipulate that the purchase must be for a minimum of 2,000 baht per person, per store, per day and be from an approved store (the approved stores have VAT refund stickers at the cashier desk or in the entrance). Tourists should show their passport at the point of



purchase and ask for a VAT refund form (Por Por 10). Be sure to retain all original tax receipts. When leaving the country and passing through passport control, visitors will have the form and receipts processed by Revenue Department officials and receive a VAT refund. Be sure to allow extra time to your check-in schedule for the process. VAT is 7% and usually included in the sale price.

Hand-carried luxury goods including jewelry, gold, watches, glasses and pens valued at 10,000 baht or more per item will be re-inspected at the VAT Refund Office after passport control.

The Customs office is located in the passenger terminal on the fourth floor, behind the check-in counter on Row H.

If you are in a hurry, you may drop your application form and tax invoices (after all inspections have been made by Customs and Revenue officers) into the box located in front of the VAT Refund Office. Or you may mail them to VAT Refund for Tourists Office, The Revenue Department of Thailand, 90 Phaholyothin 7, Phayathai, Bangkok 10400, Thailand. Consult the Thai Department of Revenue website for more information. <http://www.rd.go.th/vrt>.

Hotel accommodation is subject to a 7% VAT, and some places add a 10% service charge as well.

## **Tipping**

Some major hotels and restaurants exact a service charge that is included in the bill (usually 10%). In a restaurant, a tip of 30 baht is adequate for a meal of around 500 baht. You are not expected to tip in cheap restaurants, cafes or noodle shops. Ladies in massage parlors survive off tips. 100 baht for a one or two hour massage is appropriate.

Taxi drivers don't expect tips, but passengers often round up the metered fare to the next 5 baht-10 baht. As anyone who has ever driven in Bangkok's hideous traffic will agree, it's hard to begrudge the drivers a few extra baht.

## **Weather**

The climate is tropical and humid for most of the year. The best time to visit Bangkok is November-February, when the northeast monsoon is blowing cool, dry air that serves as a respite from the heat. Temperatures at that time of year range 65-90 F/18-32 C. Nights in December can be particularly cool.

The worst time to visit is in April and May, when the heat has even the Thais complaining. (Air pollution is also at its worst then.) In the hot season, temperatures average about 92 F/34 C, although it's not uncommon to exceed 100 F/37 C. The wet season (late May-October) is characterized by heavy rain almost every day. The city has a poor drainage system, and even brief spells of rain can result in moderate flooding in some parts of the city.

## **What to Wear**

Travelers should keep in mind that Thais often judge a person's social standing by his or her clothing and overall appearance. But the real determining factor on what to wear for most people visiting Bangkok is the heat. We recommend taking clothes made from lightweight natural fibers. Most of the clothes sold in Bangkok, and the rest of the country, are made with the hot weather in mind. Lots of people wear sandals or flip flops, but visitors should also take sneakers or some kind of shoe wear that protects the toes—it is



easy to stub your toes or even cut your feet on the uneven and cluttered sidewalks. Very few restaurants require a jacket or tie.

Visitors during the rainy season should take an umbrella and some waterproof clothing.

When visiting a temple, dress in a respectful and culturally sensitive manner—no shorts, tight or torn jeans, short skirts or sleeveless tops. At the Grand Palace, women wearing leggings (as opposed to proper trousers) will be asked to cover up. Few people other than children and tourists wear shorts. Long, lightweight pants are comfortable even in the heat, but jeans will become uncomfortably warm. If you are in Bangkok for business, a lightweight suit and tie are the uniform.

## Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

### Overview

#### Introduction

The Vietnamese people seem to use the names Saigon, Ho Chi Minh City or simply HCMC interchangeably.

By any name, Ho Chi Minh City is the economic center of Vietnam, although geographically it's 700 mi/1,120 km south of Hanoi. With a rapidly growing population, new hotels, chic bars and trendy clubs, Ho Chi Minh City is enjoying a climate of prosperity and growth.



On Ho Chi Minh City's doorstep is the Mekong delta, with its burgeoning markets, luminous green rice fields, Khmer pagodas, and fruit and flower orchards. The best way to view this tropical wonderland is by boat—you can rent a tour boat in the delta towns of Ben Tre, Vinh Long and Can Tho.

### Port Information

#### Location

Saigon Port was established during the French colonial rule and was then known as Saigon Commercial Port.

The port is located along the Saigon River. Its three terminals are Nha Rong, Khanh Hoi and Tan Thuan. The port also includes various mooring buoys on either side of the river. Larger ships have to dock at Phu My, which is two and a half hours away from the city.

Most cruise lines provide shuttles from the dock that drop people off at the Rex Hotel, which is in the center of the city. If you need to take a taxi, the taxis outside the dock gates are much cheaper than those that are inside.





## Potpourri

There is a two-tiered price structure in Vietnam, with a tourist price and a lower Vietnamese price. You will be paying the tourist price. This is only fair, as the median wage in Vietnam is about US\$49 a month, while US\$90 a month is considered positively middle-class.

An estimated 6.5 million motorbikes are found on the streets of Ho Chi Minh City. The most frequently replaced part of a motorbike is the horn.

## See & Do

### Sightseeing

The old Saigon landmarks—the Notre Dame Cathedral, the Rex Hotel, the Hotel de Ville—are still there. But new office towers, built by multinational corporations now setting up shop in Vietnam, are radically changing the skyline.

There are nearly 200 temples and pagodas in the city. For lovers of recent history, the Xa Lao Pagoda is the site where a monk immolated himself to protest the Diem regime in 1963. In the reception hall of the Giac Lam Pagoda you can see the portraits of monks who passed away years ago (below the portraits, note the monks' funeral tablets inscribed in ancient *nom*, the original Vietnamese script). The Emperor of Jade Pagoda is filled with gilded figures and papier-mache statues of Buddhist and Taoist divinities.

Ho Chi Minh City's millions of motorbikes emit a constant roar and palpable exhaust, and the city's two- and three-hour traffic jams are legendary. Give yourself plenty of travel time if you go exploring.

## Historic Sites

### Reunification Palace

106 D Nguyen Du  
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

History buffs should stop by the Reunification Palace, where the South Vietnamese government officially turned over power to the North on 30 April 1975. During the fall of Saigon, North Vietnamese tanks broke down the gates and raised the communist flag. It's a trip back in time, particularly the "strategy rooms" in the basement and the upper floors filled with 1960s furnishings.

## Museums

### Ho Chi Minh City Museum

1 Nguyen Tat Thanh St.  
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Formerly known as Revolutionary Museum, this museum showcases very old photos of the city, documents relating to its founding, and archaeological and ethnic survey items.



## National History Museum

2 Nguyen Binh Khiem, District 1  
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

This museum portrays the history of the Vietnamese people through displays, exhibits and artifacts of ethnological and cultural significance. Items include stone tools, cannons, Roman coins and more. Display texts are available in English, Vietnamese and French.

## War Remnants Museum

28 Vo Van Tan St.  
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Among the items displayed at this museum are a guillotine, phosphorus bombs, weapons, tanks, helicopters and more.

## Neighborhoods & Districts

### Dong Khoi Street

One of the primary commercial centers of the city, this street has beautiful examples of fine French architecture that include the Central Post Office, the Notre Dame Cathedral and the Saigon Opera House. It also offers cafes, boutiques, shops and restaurants.

### Le Loi

Named after the founder of the Le Loi Dynasty, this street is one of the key shopping areas in the city. It has art galleries, spas, small fashion boutiques and high-end restaurants.

## Parks & Gardens

### Cong Vien Van Hoa Park

Nguyen Binh Khiem Street  
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Located adjacent to the Reunification Palace, Cong Vien Van Hoa Park is a pleasant place to watch locals practicing Vietnamese tai chi in the early morning. In the evening, there are huge aerobics classes. The picturesque park also features many large tropical trees, tennis courts, a swimming pool and coffee shops.

### Dam Sen Park

District 11 (northwest of Cholon)  
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

If you are traveling with children, Dam Sen Park is a blessing. The expansive park offers a wide range of attractions to keep youngsters amused, including a lake with paddleboats, a monorail, roller coaster, an aviary and a dinosaur park. On Saturday and Sunday, shows are held in a bandstand.

## Ho Chi Minh Zoo and Botanical Gardens

2 Nguyen Binh Khiem, Ben Nghe Quarter, District 1  
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam



Created in 1864 by the celebrated French botanist J.B. Louis Pierre, this is a pleasant place to enjoy a stroll. The botanical collection occupies a 20-acre/8-hectare site and includes nearly 2,000 trees and many rare orchids. The zoo houses hundreds of species of mammals, reptiles and birds.

## Religious Sites

### Basilica Notre Dame de Saigon

Duong Nguyen Du, District 1  
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Situated in the heart of Ho Chi Minh City, Basilica Notre Dame de Saigon is part of the architectural and religious legacy of the French. It was constructed 1877-80, and all materials were imported from France, including the set of six huge bells that hang in the two 190-ft/58-m bell towers. The decoration is in the Romanesque and Gothic styles. In 1960, the Vatican established Vietnamese religious orders and appointed a bishop to Ho Chi Minh City. Two years later, the cathedral was named Basilica Notre Dame de Saigon. Worshippers today include both Vietnamese Catholics and visitors.

Mass is held on Sunday and is given in French, English and Vietnamese.

### Caodai Holy See Temple

The spiritual center of the Caodai sect, founded in 1926 by Ngo Minh Chieu. This religious movement was created by drawing on aspects of Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Islam, Spiritualism and Catholicism. The temple was constructed 1933-55 in a unique architectural style that reflects its intriguing mix of traditions. In many ways, Caodai resembles a Christian cathedral. It includes aisles, square towers and a central nave with upper gallery. Decoration, however, is extravagant and colorful. The three principal colors of Caodai are yellow for Buddhism, blue for Taoism and red for Christianity. Four ceremonies are held each day. About 60 mi/100 km northwest of Ho Chi Minh City. It's best seen on an organized tour from Ho Chi Minh City; journey time is about two hours.

### Jade Emperor Pagoda

73 Mai Thi Luu St.  
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Regarded as one of the finest temples in Vietnam, the Jade Emperor Pagoda is a must-see on any travel itinerary. This glorious temple was built by the Chinese community at the turn of the 20th century and is beautifully decorated with elaborate carvings from top to bottom. The image of the Jade Emperor stands in the main room surrounded by other deities such as the Taoist God of Longevity. Thick with incense smoke and filled with devout worshippers, the temple is extremely atmospheric.

## Shopping

The most interesting markets are Cho Binh and Cho Ben Thanh, but we also recommend Cholon's Ben Tay market (take a boat down the Ben Nghe Channel). Shop on Dong Khoi Street for the city's highest-quality wares (antiques and other souvenirs).

Cholon is the city's Chinatown and is worth a visit for the bustle, the temples and assembly halls. Visit the Nghia Assembly Hall to see the beautiful gold-painted wooden boat that hangs over the entrance.



The Tax Department Store opposite the Rex Hotel (a favorite with U.S. officers during the war) has a good selection of Vietnamese items made for export.

Bargaining is an essential skill for everything from heavy teak-wood furniture to a pack of gum. Usually, it's a good-natured negotiation in which you will end up slightly higher than halfway between the original asking price and what you offered.

To discourage street peddlers, the gesture for "no, go away" is a flat hand moved back and forth in a sharp cutting motion at waist level. Don't even glance at their wares unless you want to endure a long siege.

## Markets

### Ben Thanh Market

This large market downtown is popular for its offerings of handicrafts, souvenirs and local foods.

Phone 8-3829-2096.

### Dan Sinh Market

104 D Yersin (next to Phung Son Tu Pagoda,  
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

If you're looking for army surplus goods, this is the place to get them.

## Shopping Areas

### Saigon Centre

65 Le Loi Blvd.  
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

**Phone:** 8-3829-4888

<http://www.saigoncentre.com.vn>

This well-organized mall features international fashion and accessories shops on the first floor, home furnishings and lifestyle outlets on the second floor and a cafe on the ground floor.

### Tax Trade Center

135 Nguyen Hue St.  
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

**Phone:** 8-3821-3849

<http://thuongxatax.com.vn>

This shopping center features a variety of goods including jewelry, clothes, souvenirs, cosmetics, handicrafts, fine arts and more. It also has a cafe and a restaurant, a kids' indoor play area and a supermarket. The unique architecture still retains some French colonial influences.

### Zen Plaza

54- 56 Nguyen Trai St.  
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam



**Phone:** 8-3925-0339

<http://zenplaza.com.vn>

This Japanese-owned shopping center features various well-known fashion brands and a designer boutique.

## Specialty Stores

### Annam Gourmet Market

16-18 Hai Ba Trung St.  
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

**Phone:** 8-3822-9332

<http://www.annam-gourmet.com>

This place sells a wide range of gourmet foods and drinks such as cheese, deli items, fruits, vegetables, wine and gluten-free products.

### Coconut Shop

100 Mac Thi Bui St.  
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

This place sells various hand-embroidered handbags, clutches and purses in various sizes and shapes. Most are made of silk, and handles are designed using lacquered bamboo or fabric.

### Mai Handicrafts

298 Nguyen Trong Tuyen  
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

**Phone:** 08-3844-0988

<http://www.maihandicrafts.com>

Mai offers fair-trade products such as basketware, ceramics, ethnic fabrics and gifts made by poor and disadvantaged women

## Dining

### Local & Regional

#### Dong Pho Restaurant

57 Ho Xua Huong St.  
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

**Phone:** 8-930-7665

<http://www.dongphorestaurant.com>

Dong Pho is known for its *pho*, a traditional Vietnamese dish of white noodles in broth with beef or chicken. Also serving other local dishes and desserts, this place is popular among locals for its friendly service and affordable prices.



## Lemon Grass Restaurant

55-56 Nguyen Hue St., Ben Nghe (in the Palace Saigon Hotel.)  
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

**Phone:** 8-3829-2860

<http://www.palacesaigon.com/restaurantsbars/lemongrass-restaurant.html>

Dine on authentic Vietnamese cuisine while enjoying panoramic views of the city.

## Cuisines

### American

### Sama

35 Dong Du St.  
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

This cozy place offers a variety of sandwiches as well as salads and pasta.

### Asian

## Bombay Indian Restaurant

35 Deng Du St.  
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

**Phone:** 0-9038-63114

<http://www.bombayrestaurantsaigon.com>

This place serves traditional Indian fare such as soups, fried meats, curries and breads.

## Li Bai Chinese Restaurant

88 Dong Khoi (in the Sheraton Saigon Hotel and Towers, Level Two)  
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

**Phone:** 8-3827-2828

<http://www.libaisaigon.com/en>

This restaurant serves a mix of traditional Chinese specialties and Cantonese food, including more than 50 types of dim sum. Both buffet and a la carte choices are available.

## Monsoon Restaurant & Bar

1 Cao Ba Nha, Nguyen Cu Trinh Ward  
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

This restaurant treats diners to Southeast Asian fare by combining signature dishes of Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar and Laos.



## Spice Thai Restaurant

27 Le Quy Don  
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

**Phone:** 8-3930-7873

<http://spicevn.com>

The menu comprises more than 100 dishes including traditional Thai and vegetarian dishes. Check out the Thai barbecue, which you can have one of the Thai chefs prepare for you or you can grill it yourself at your table.

## Fusion

### La Habana

6 Cao Ba Quat St.  
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

**Phone:** 8-3829-5180

<http://www.lahabana-saigon.com>

Featuring a Cuban-Spanish-based architecture, La Habana is popular for its traditional Spanish cuisine with more than 50 types of tapas and Cuban cocktails. Other Spanish favorites such as paellas, tenderloins and tornedos are also available.

## Italian

### Opera

2 Lam Son Square (in the Park Hyatt Saigon)  
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

**Phone:** 8-3824-1234

<http://saigon.park.hyatt.com/en/hotel/dining/Opera.html>

This casual trattoria-style place features pastas, pizzas cooked on a wood-fired oven, and other homemade Italian dishes. You can dine alfresco overlooking Lam Son Square. There's a notable wine cellar, too.

## Pomodoro Italian Restaurant

79 Hai Ba Trung, Ben Nghe  
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

**Phone:** 8-3823-8998

<http://www.pomodoro-vietnam.com>

Pomodoro is popular for its Italian cuisine served in a trattoria-like atmosphere.

## Mediterranean

### Skewers Mediterranean Restaurant

9A Thai Van Lung St.  
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

**Phone:** 8-3822-4798



<http://www.skewers-restaurant.com>

Skewers offers a wide range of soups, pastas, salads, appetizers and grilled dishes.

## Seafood

### RedHouse Restaurant

417 Dien Bien Phu  
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

**Phone:** 8-3933-3399

<http://www.redhouse.com.vn>

Among the items on the menu at RedHouse are black-pepper crab, chilli crab, and bamboo clam grilled with spring onion and braised tofu in claypot. Prawns, lobster and fish are also available.

### Song Ngu Seafood Restaurant

70-72 Suong Nguyet Anh St.  
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

**Phone:** 8-3832-5017

<http://www.songngu.com/en>

Among the specialties at Song Ngu are crab spring roll, mantis shrimp fried with garlic, and lobster congee.

## Steak Houses

### Le Steak de Saigon

15 Dong Du, Ben Nghe  
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

This place is well-known for its French steak frites. Other dishes include beef fondue, roast beef fillet, rib-eye steak and beef tartare.

## Security

### Etiquette

If you are invited to someone's home for a meal, consider giving the host a gift that can be used daily. But avoid giving gifts in an office after a business meeting as this can be considered a bribe.

### Personal Safety

It's been more than 30 years since the fall of Saigon, and Vietnam has worked hard to clear the land of unexploded ordnance, especially near tourist areas. Unless you are hiking in extremely remote regions, it is unlikely to be a problem.

Ho Chi Minh City has a bad reputation for muggings, so be extremely careful. Do not wear jewelry, keep cell phones in back pockets, or drape your camera or handbag over one shoulder. Carrying your camera





and valuables in a double plastic shopping bag held firmly in hand will keep them out of view. Purses should be worn around the neck and under one arm, with a protective hand firmly gripping the strap.

Solo women travelers report moving through Vietnam without problem, though the young and lovely receive their share of romantic overtures. None are harmful or threatening.

In case of an emergency, call 113 for the police, 114 for the fire department and 115 for an ambulance.

For the latest information, contact your country's travel-advisory agency.

## Health

Ho Chi Minh City has full-scale, modern medical facilities. Health clinics can handle first-aid and minor injuries, and they will refer you to the larger centers if necessary. Medicines are often free, but donations are encouraged. Sanitary conditions throughout the country can cause problems for some visitors.

Most hot, freshly cooked food should be safe, but peel fresh fruits and raw vegetables, make sure meat is cooked thoroughly and never drink the tap water. Stick with bottled water, soft drinks and, of course, beer. Wine, both imported and domestic, is widely available in Ho Chi Minh City (another legacy from the days of French rule).

For more information, contact your country's health-advisory agency.

## Disabled Advisory

Surprisingly, in a country where there are so many amputees (the result of land-mine accidents), there is little help for the disabled traveler. Only upmarket hotels have made efforts to ease travel. Staffers in all service industries are extremely helpful, but great care needs to be taken on the streets.

## Facts

### Dos & Don'ts

Don't cross your fingers for good luck—Vietnamese consider the gesture obscene. And don't point your finger at people or beckon them with the palm facing upward.

Do remove your shoes before entering Buddhist pagodas, most private homes and even businesses. If there's a pile of shoes outside the door, add yours to it. Be sure not to let the soles of your feet face any sacred monument, such as a statue of Buddha.

Don't, under any circumstances, be tempted to deal in the black market. Never change money on the street—it's against the law.

Don't argue loudly or shout. A show of bad temper is a sign of poor emotional control and is a sure loss of face in the eyes of Vietnamese people.

Do receive objects and even change with both hands if that is the way it is offered. It is respectful to do so.



Don't bow from the waist as Chinese, Japanese and Koreans do. Close a conversation or transaction with a sharp bow of the head only. Shake hands only if your partner initiates the gesture.

Do take a washcloth if you are accustomed to using one. They are not easily found in Vietnam. Quick-drying, antimicrobial versions are sold in the backpacking-supplies section of sporting-goods stores.

Don't touch people of the opposite sex, but if you find yourself in friendly conversation with a Vietnamese friend, expect to be gently touched on the forearm or shoulder as a sign of trust.

Do dress neatly and modestly. Pants should be below the knee for both men and women. Shirts should have sleeves, especially if you're visiting a religious site.

Don't forget your sense of humor. Most Vietnamese enjoy a joke and often engage in a form of good-natured ribbing that may seem aggressive to new arrivals. Feel free to respond in kind. Where spoken language fails, a smile and pantomime that includes amusing body language will win you many friends.

Do be yourself. Most Vietnamese are as eager to learn about your culture as you are to visit theirs.

## Geostats

**Passport/Visa Requirements:** Passports and visas are necessary for citizens of Canada and the U.S. Passports must have at least a year left before expiration. Visas must be obtained prior to arrival. They are available from any Vietnamese Embassy, whether in the U.S. or in the capitals of neighboring Cambodia, Laos or China. You will need three passport-size photos to complete your application.

When leaving, expect to pay a departure tax at the airport and make sure you still have the departure form that was given to you when you arrived in the country. Reconfirm travel document requirements with your travel agent before departure.

**Languages:** Vietnamese (official), French, English, Chinese.

**Predominant Religions:** Buddhist (Theravada and Mahayana), Christian (Roman Catholic), Taoist.

**Time Zone:** 7 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (+7 GMT). Daylight Saving Time is not observed.

**Voltage Requirements:** 110 volts.

**Telephone Codes:** 84, country code; 08, Ho Chi Minh City code;

## Money

### Currency Exchange

The dong is the currency of Vietnam. ATMs frequently offer 2 million dong withdrawals, which takes some getting used to. You will learn to count zeros backward from right to left to determine if you are holding a 1,000- or 10,000-dong note in your hand. U.S. dollars are accepted in most locations, but you'll have a better time negotiating a good price if you stick to the dong.

The easiest way to obtain local currency is through ATMs. Banks and better hotels also offer exchange services, but the rates won't be as favorable. Do not change money on the street.



All major credit cards can be used in more upscale locations, but they are rarely accepted in smaller shops and restaurants. Any credit card transactions will incur a 3% or 4% surcharge on the purchase price. As ATMs become more widespread, traveler's checks are becoming less negotiable and will be subject to at least a 2% surcharge where they are accepted.

Do spend down all your dong before leaving Vietnam, because dong cannot be converted back into U.S. or Canadian currency, nor is it possible to exchange dong for the currency of any neighboring countries.

## **Taxes**

Value-added-tax, or VAT, is levied at 10% in Vietnam. Hotel rates are subject to 10% government tax and 5% service charge.

## **Tipping**

Gratuities usually aren't necessary in inexpensive restaurants, but even a small tip will be greatly appreciated. If you're going to visit a restaurant regularly, a tip is a worthy investment to ensure prompt service, and good service should always be acknowledged with a small tip left behind on the table. Upscale places will often tack on a 5%-12% service charge.

Tips for taxi drivers are purely optional (and most appreciated, however small).

## **Weather**

The best months to visit are October-December, when temperatures are relatively mild and nights are cool (highs around 88 F/31 C, lows around 71 F/22 C).

Be warned that monsoons can turn roads to mud, so keep your travel plans flexible if visiting at that time of year.

## **What to Wear**

If you're traveling for business, prepare to dress sharply in well-tailored business suits (for both men and women). It may be easier (and more fun) to have a couple of suits custom-made for you by the expert tailors in Ho Chi Minh City. The price for a bespoke suit in Vietnam is a fraction of what you'd pay for off-the-rack ones in the U.S. Silk ties are a bargain, too, and are sold in most hotel boutiques.

Most all Vietnamese dress conservatively in clean, pressed clothes with short- or long-sleeved shirts (not sleeveless or halter-top) and full- or capri-length pants. Tight or revealing clothing is not acceptable.



## Da Nang, Vietnam

### Overview

#### Introduction

The coastal city of Da Nang, the major port in the central part of Vietnam, was home to a huge U.S. Air Force base during the U.S. war with Vietnam. Da Nang is halfway between Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, 380 mi/610 km southeast of Hanoi, and growing quickly. It's noted for art and architecture from the Cham Dynasty.



The Museum of Cham Sculpture houses the finest display of Cham sculpture and artifacts in the world. The collection was assembled in the 1920s-30s by French archaeologists and experts from L'Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Orient (EFEO). The museum houses more than 2,000 large and small sculptures, which are displayed throughout the main building and garden. The majority of bronze, sandstone and terracotta sculptures date from the 12th-13th centuries. There is also a collection of clothing, some photographs and film. An excellent trilingual guidebook is also available. 2 Thang 9 St. Phone 0511-347-0114. <http://www.chammuseum.danang.vn>.

The My Son Sanctuary, 44 mi/70 km southwest of Da Nang, features the remains of a former imperial city of the Cham dynasty, whose culture flourished in Vietnam in the fourth to 13th centuries. The impressive complex, a UNESCO World Heritage site, includes beautiful stone temples and towers. The spiritual roots of Cham culture lie in Hinduism, and this can be clearly seen in the design of the towering temples. Following the discovery of the My Son complex, many of the statues of female dancers and deities worshipped by the Cham were removed and displayed in the Museum of Cham Sculpture in Da Nang.

Just south of Da Nang, the Marble Mountains are the highlight of the area. These five peaks were tiny islands until silt filled in the surrounding area. Each mountain is named after one of the five elements of the Buddhist universe: fire, water, earth, wood and metal. On Thuy Son (Water Mountain), you'll find caves that have been turned into natural pagodas as altars and statues of Buddha and bodhisattvas have been added. A trail of steep steps (about 900 of them) leads up the mountain.

Marble sculptors display their skill at roadside stalls or in collective marketplaces throughout the area. If you've always longed for a larger-than-life marble Buddha or an exquisite palm-sized jade elephant, there's your chance. Larger stores will arrange shipping to the U.S. and Canada. This is a good place to practice bargaining skills, as initial quotes can often be lowered by 30% or more.

On the coast near the mountains is the famous China Beach. Along with its crystal water and white sand, it now boasts a luxury resort, and food stalls and souvenir shops line the streets. Other good beaches in the area include My Khe Beach (one of the area's best) and Nam O Beach (a great place to see fishing boats). Be careful of the strong cross-currents when swimming.



## Port Information

### Location

Cruise ships dock at Cat Tien Sa Port, which is about 30 minutes away from downtown Da Nang. Most cruise ships offer a shuttle service to transport passengers into the city, with a drop-off point near the markets. Some taxis are available at the port gates, though it is a bit of a walk to get to where they gather. The dock area is extremely industrial, but there are a handful of souvenir stalls clustered around the pier.

Hoi An, an UNESCO World Heritage site, is 45 minutes away from the port by taxi.

### Halong Bay, Vietnam

## Overview

### Introduction

Halong Bay is a slice of the South China Sea about 75 mi/120 km southeast of Hanoi that is speckled with more than 2,000 isolated limestone peaks (known as karsts) rising straight up out of the water. A group of 1,900 of these islets has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage site.



Nevertheless, gone are the days when you could enjoy a peaceful cruise across the bay. Halong Bay is now one of Vietnam's biggest attractions, and tour groups flock to the area. It can get extremely crowded with vendors and the boat tours that operate there, including night cruises and party boats, which can be very noisy.

Tours from Hanoi include a leisurely boat trip through the craggy islands. Some boat operators will drop anchor so you can dive into the calm waters or kayak when the weather is cooler. Other tours lead you through grottoes and caves with bizarre rock sculptures. (Be sure to take a flashlight.) Try to get a tour that lets you sleep overnight on the boat. Accommodations are simple but adequate (private cabin, shared toilet), and the views at sunset and sunrise are unforgettable.

At adjacent Cat Ba Island National Park, you can see monkeys, explore caves and swim over coral reefs. Nearby Yen Tu Mountain hides a Buddhist temple in a lovely setting.

## Port Information

### Location

Halong Bay is an extremely popular cruise destination. It is a tourist area in its own right and is also a point of disembarkation for people visiting Hanoi, which is about three to four hours away.

Cruise ships have a variety of options for anchoring around Halong: Some ships dock at the commercial pier, while others dock at the relatively new passenger terminal, which is located on Tuan Chau Island, and some ships anchor in the bay and tender passengers into the city of Halong. Each option places visitors relatively far outside of the city center, but there isn't much to see in the city itself anyway.



## Hong Kong

### Overview

#### Introduction

Hong Kong is a place of contrasts—geographically, socially and economically. Although many Asian cities claim to be where East meets West, the former British Crown Colony is probably the closest the world comes to the genuine article.

Travel to Hong Kong and scratch the cosmopolitan, high-tech surface and you'll discover vestiges of ancient China in its culture. Residents invariably live in two worlds: Skyscrapers and enormous shopping malls adjoin narrow alleys crowded with traditional vendors' stalls. Businesspeople use cell phones to consult fortune-tellers before making important decisions. Even as they are deeply into technology, they preserve ancient customs—particularly in regards to the correct feng shui of buildings. Only a few miles/kilometers away, farmers and gardeners in less frequented villages in the New Territories tend their crops much as they have for generations.



Perched precariously on the edge of the People's Republic of China, Hong Kong—with its strategic deepwater harbor and proximity to the rest of Asia's most populous nation—profited for decades as the capitalist gateway for the communist giant to the north. What was once a settlement of fishing villages became one of the world's busiest international ports and business centers.

Hong Kong is a city of levels. At the top is Victoria Peak, on Hong Kong Island, from which mansions of the super-rich look out over the high-rise apartments of the merely affluent. Farther down the mountain are alleys and tenements dotted with colorful balcony gardens. Living on the water itself are the remnants of Hong Kong's boat people—fishing families who traditionally spent most of their lives on their boats.

Across the harbor on the mainland are Kowloon and the suburban New Territories, which were once Hong Kong's vegetable garden and now also host Hong Kong Disneyland. Although the popular image of Hong Kong is a place where every square inch/centimeter of land is crammed with high-rise apartments and office buildings, in reality 38% of all land in Hong Kong is designated as national parks and special areas. There are wonderful scenic areas and hiking routes ranging from gentle family walks to challenging long-distance trails.

This is also a time of transition for Hong Kong. Tourists and businesses from neighboring China increasingly fuel Hong Kong's economy. Hong Kong has become a popular shopping destination for Chinese visitors on holidays, weekend jaunts or en route to or from Southeast Asia.



## Highlights

**Sights**—A trip via the 100-year-old tram to the top of Victoria Peak; a ride on the picturesque Star Ferry; sightseeing from trams along the island.

**Museums**—Hong Kong Science Museum; Hong Kong Museum of History; Hong Kong Museum of Art; Flagstaff House Museum of Tea Ware; Hong Kong Heritage Museum; Hong Kong Maritime Museum.

**Memorable Meals**—Dim sum at the six-decades-old Luk Yu Tea House & Restaurant on Stanley Street; afternoon tea in the lobby of the Peninsula Hotel; taking the world's longest escalator to Staunton Street for a drink or meal at one of the bars, cafes or restaurants in hip SoHo.

**Late Night**—Temple Street Night Market, with hawkers selling everything from snacks to watches to blue jeans; shoulder-to-shoulder bars and clubs in Lan Kwai Fong and along nearby Wyndham Street in Central for eating, drinking and people-watching; views of Hong Kong from Aqua Spirit.

**Walks**—Walking around the top of Victoria Peak to take in the magnificent views of the city and the South China Sea; hiking the Dragon's Back above Shek O; experiencing the local passion for racing at Happy Valley Racecourse on a Wednesday evening (September-June); having your palm and/or face read by fortune-tellers on Temple Street; shopping for antiques along Hollywood Road.

**Especially for Kids**—Cable cars, aquarium, dolphin shows and rides at Ocean Park; the aviary in Hong Kong Park; sand castles and a barbecue lunch at Shek O Beach; Hong Kong Disneyland; Hong Kong Space Museum; a ride in the Ngong Ping 360 cable cars on Lantau Island.

## Geography

Hong Kong lies on China's southern seaboard and is surrounded by the mainland Chinese province of Guangdong, the capital of which is Guangzhou (formerly called Canton).

Hong Kong is divided into three distinct regions: Hong Kong Island, the Kowloon Peninsula and the New Territories, which include the largely rural mainland area north of Kowloon and south of the border with China and the more than 260 Outlying Islands that speckle the South China Sea. The New Territories is also home to large, high-density new towns such as Tuen Mun and Tsuen Wan, created in recent decades to handle population overspill from Kowloon and Hong Kong Island.

The whole territory covers 426 sq mi/1,104 sq km, accommodating a population of more than 7.1 million people, predominantly of Chinese descent.

Parts of Hong Kong, including Hong Kong Island and Kowloon, are among the most densely populated areas in the world. The two are separated by the historically important Victoria Harbor, a naturally sheltered deepwater port (Hong Kong, or *Heung Gong*, means "fragrant harbor" in the local Cantonese dialect); it is abuzz with luxury liners, cargo ships, ferries and pleasure junks.

At the southernmost tip of Kowloon is Tsim Sha Tsui, Hong Kong's most prominent tourist district. Tsim Sha Tsui's main traffic artery is Nathan Road, a bustling, neon-lit strip of camera shops, tailors, souvenir vendors, upscale boutiques, hotels, restaurants and bars known as the Golden Mile. Nathan Road continues north through Jordan, Yau Ma Tei and Mong Kok, areas also notable for their retail outlets and nightlife.



On the north side of Hong Kong Island, directly across the harbor from Tsim Sha Tsui, Central district is the financial and commercial heart of the city. The densely packed, middle-class residential neighborhood above Central but below the heights of Victoria Peak is aptly called the Mid-Levels.

Directly east of Central is Wan Chai—once a bawdy entertainment district but increasingly becoming a less expensive eating and drinking option than Central's Lan Kwai Fong and Wyndham Street. (It's perhaps best known as the location for the 1961 film *The World of Suzie Wong*.) Next in line is the bustling shopping district of Causeway Bay. Directly inland behind Causeway Bay nestles Happy Valley, an exclusive residential district and site of the more dramatic of Hong Kong's two racecourses (the other is in Sha Tin in the New Territories) and Hong Kong Stadium, which hosts major sporting events including the Rugby Sevens.

Prime real estate and sandy beaches characterize the southern part of Hong Kong Island. Several of the Outlying Islands, with a decidedly Mediterranean atmosphere, can be reached by ferry. The largest is Lantau, which can also be reached from Hong Kong Island and Kowloon by road and rail via a suspension bridge. Lantau is the site of Hong Kong International Airport at Chek Lap Kok.

The picturesque islands of Lamma, Peng Chau and Cheung Chau are also popular weekend getaways. Another popular getaway area is the Sai Kung Peninsula in the New Territories, where there are weekend houses and a country atmosphere around quiet or even deserted villages.

## History

There is evidence of fishing and farming settlements in the area dating back 6,000 years, but Hong Kong's history is generally documented from the 17th century, when the Manchus from the frigid northeastern regions ruled all of China. Hong Kong's location near the mouth of the strategically important Pearl River made it a favored port of call for trading vessels—and the haunt of pirates and adventurers from around the globe.

Although China regarded trade with foreigners as distasteful, it allowed the Portuguese to establish a colony in nearby Macau in the mid-1550s to trade in Chinese goods; Guangzhou (also called Canton) on the Pearl River was opened to foreign traders in 1685. Uninterested in foreign goods, imperial China thrived on exports of its teas, silks and porcelain.

The situation changed in the late 18th century when British traders discovered the Chinese would buy opium, which they imported from India. When the emperor tried to end the lucrative practice, Britain seized upon the issue to expand economic trade in the region, prompting the Anglo-Chinese War of 1839-42 (also known as the Opium War). No match for Britain's warships, China reluctantly gave up Hong Kong Island to the British in 1841. Further concessions in land and trading opportunities were wrested from China in other skirmishes. It subsequently was forced to cede the Kowloon Peninsula and scores of surrounding islands—roughly 90% of Hong Kong—but in 1898 successfully negotiated the transfer so that it was done as a 99-year lease.

In 1997, when Hong Kong was transferred back to China as a Special Administrative Region (SAR), the Chinese government promised one country, two systems. For the most part, it has kept its word, but the SAR has also had to contend with a more open China and its larger role in the global economy. Where Hong Kong was once the exclusive gateway to trade with China, there are now many ports of entry. Observers speculate that storied Shanghai may seize Hong Kong's leadership role as a place of business, eventually.





Following an outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in early 2003, government campaigns to encourage cleanliness and greater investment in city services have led to a cleaner Hong Kong. Sanitary hand-cleanser dispensers can be found alongside most elevator banks, a reminder of ongoing awareness, and toilet rolls are almost universally in place.

A more serious problem is the pollution caused in part by more than 50,000 factories just across the border in Guangdong Province, mostly built with Hong Kong investment. Many local people suffer pollution-related health problems, and each year there are a greater number of days of very high pollution, despite that the government has banned high-polluting vehicles and offered subsidies to replace diesel-powered buses and trucks to combat the problem. Still, Hong Kong offers advantages unavailable in China's buoyant economy, such as a transparent financial system. It remains a vibrant example of British order and Chinese industriousness.

## Port Information

### Location

Cruise-ship visitors have in the past arrived at Ocean Terminal, on the western side of Tsim Sha Tsui (pronounced *chim-sa-choy*) in Kowloon. The Ocean Terminal is adjacent to Harbour City, a 700-plus unit shopping complex that includes restaurants, three hotels and two cinemas.  
<http://www.oceanterminal.com.hk>.

This cruise terminal is within a short walk of the Hong Kong Cultural Centre with its art and space museums as well as access to the MTR subway system, taxis and Star Ferry terminal. A Hong Kong Tourism information center is open in Star Ferry Concourse daily 8 am-8 pm. There is also a taxi rank.

Hong Kong's Kai Tak Cruise Terminal opened in 2013. The terminal was built at the end of a runway at the old Kai Tak Airport, which closed in 1998. The second berth opened in late 2014. The terminal can accommodate Royal Caribbean's Oasis and Allure of the Seas, the largest ships in the cruise industry.  
<http://www.kaitakcruiseterminal.com.hk>.

### Potpourri

One of the few nods to the days of the British Empire, the Noonday Gun has been fired every day from Causeway Bay since the 1840s.

Chinese and British traditions still intertwine; barristers in formal wigs and gowns plead their cases in Cantonese.

The world's most expensive tree preservation project was the HK\$24 million (about US\$3 million) spent on the upkeep of a 120-year-old banyan tree in Pacific Place mall on Hong Kong Island.

Playwright and composer Noel Coward was a regular at the Peninsula Hotel and immortalized it in his song *Mad Dogs and Englishmen*. Other celebrity vignettes include the story that Clark Gable taught the Peninsula's barman how to make a screwdriver cocktail. And when Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton walked through the lobby, it is said that the chatter of afternoon tea (where every day 1,000 scones are consumed) was stilled.



Kowloon tailors compete for the fastest record from cloth to finished suit. Sam the Tailor on Nathan Road holds the record at 1 hour, 52 minutes for Britain's Prince Charles; more normal times are approximately 12 hours to slightly more than three days, with two fittings preferred.

Hong Kong people are the world's leading consumers of oranges; they go through more than 200,000 tons per year. Much of the fruit is initially bought as altar offerings for ancestral spirits and gods.

The Peninsula Hotel owns the world's largest Rolls-Royce fleet, with a total of 50 Brewster Green Rolls-Royces on hand to whisk guests around town and provide the most stylish airport pickups.

Hong Kong is the most vertical city in the world, with more than 1,300 skyscrapers, and high-rise buildings numbering in excess of 6,500.

## See & Do

### Sightseeing

Expect a wonderful mixture of colonial buildings (though these are diminishing in number), ancient Buddhist and Taoist temples and statues, traditional villages and space-age skyscrapers. The stark contrast between Hong Kong's dense urban areas and peaceful green spaces takes many visitors by surprise. Be sure you don't limit your Hong Kong experience only to urban areas—take a ferry out to one of the islands for a breath of sea air and tranquility.

More traditional and historical sights, such as Kat Hing Wai (or the Kam Tin Walled Village), are located in the New Territories north of the Kowloon Peninsula. Causeway Bay is also a fascinating strolling-and-shopping site, although it can get extremely crowded on Saturday and Sunday, during evenings and on public holidays. A walk around Victoria Peak delivers fantastic views of Hong Kong Island and beyond to Kowloon and the South China Sea. One major tourist attraction is the Po Lin Monastery's Big Buddha on Lantau Island, now accessible by cable car for those not in the mood to take the bus.

Another of Hong Kong's major attractions is the Star Ferry—refreshingly inexpensive at HK\$2.50 for the upper deck on weekdays—which runs between Hong Kong Island and Kowloon. You may end up riding it every day of your visit, but with the city views and glimpses of harbor life it offers, there's something new to see each time. Ferry piers in Central and Wan Chai regularly make the short journey over to Tsim Sha Tsui and back.

Most sights are easy to reach via tram (on Hong Kong Island), bus, taxi or the MTR, but many of Hong Kong's famous landmarks and neighborhoods can be discovered on foot without a guide. Be sure to pick up a map or pamphlets on walking tours from the Hong Kong Tourism Board's visitors centers or in the airport by the A and B exits.

## Historic Sites

### Government House

Upper Albert Road (opposite the Botanic Gardens), Central  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

<http://www.ceo.gov.hk/gh/eng/index.htm>

This Georgian-style building was the official residence of the governors of Hong Kong under British rule. It took four years to build, starting in 1851, and was still in use when Hong Kong was returned to Chinese



control in 1997. A tower was added during the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong in World War II. Presently, Government House is home to the Chief Executive of Hong Kong and is open to the public only one or two days each year. At other times, it is used for official functions and to entertain visiting dignitaries.

## Kat Hing Wai

Kam Tin (take the MTR to Tsuen Wan Station, then Bus 51)  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Also known as Kam Tin Walled Village, this was the original 10th-century homestead of the Tang clan, the first of the Cantonese Five Great Clans to migrate to the New Territories. The village may be modern inside, but it's surrounded by a moat and walls with four corner guardhouse towers. The Hong Kong Tourist Board's information centers at the Tsim Sha Tsui Star Ferry terminal and at the Peak Piazza can help you arrange to join a local tour.

Contributions to the donations box are expected, as are handouts to the costumed Hakka women, before you can take any photographs. (Begin bidding at HK\$10 and hope for the best.).

## Po Lin Monastery's Big Buddha

Po Lin Monastery, Lantau Island  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

<http://www.np360.com.hk>

This 110-ft-/34-m-tall Buddha was built atop a hill at Ngong Ping, Lantau Island, by the Chinese Space Agency and officially opened in 1989. Work up an appetite by climbing the 268 steps to the feet of the Buddha and enjoy the view of mountains, temple and sea. Later, have a vegetarian lunch prepared by the monks at the nearby Po Lin Monastery.

Get there by taking the Ngong Ping 360 cable car—prices start at HK\$150 round-trip adults, HK\$75 children—or Bus 23 from Tung Chung, or take a scenic ride on Bus 2 from Mui Wo, eastern Lantau, reached by ferry from the Outlying Islands Piers.

## St. John's Cathedral

4-8 Garden Road, Central  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2523-4157

<http://www.stjohnscathedral.org.hk>

Dating from 1849, St. John's Cathedral is the oldest Anglican church in East Asia. A handsome building in a style of 13th-century Early English and Decorated Gothic, it suffered damage in World War II but has since been restored.

Daily 7 am-6 pm. Admission is free, but there are collection boxes for donations to help with its upkeep.

## Temple of 10,000 Buddhas

Sha Tin District (above the Sha Tin railway station; go by MTR)  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong



You will have to climb 431 steps, but the reward is 12,800 statues of Buddha. The mummified body of the holy man who founded the temple's monastery, embalmed in gold leaf, is on display inside.

Daily dawn-dusk. Donations requested.

## The Clock Tower

Tsim Sha Tsui (just east of the Star Ferry Pier)  
Kowloon, Hong Kong

[http://www.amo.gov.hk/en/monuments\\_43.php](http://www.amo.gov.hk/en/monuments_43.php)

Standing near the Star Ferry Pier on the Kowloon side, the Clock Tower is the only remaining part of the old terminus for the Kowloon-Canton Railway line. Built in 1915, the tower made it into the 21st century thanks to the Heritage Society in Hong Kong, which put up a brave fight to save it as one of the few original landmarks of Tsim Sha Tsui. The promenade in front of the Clock Tower is one of the best places to watch the daily 8 pm light show on Hong Kong Island and snap a perfect postcard shot of the city's skyline. The promenade includes an Asian "Avenue of Stars," based on Hollywood's walk of fame, which also features a bronze statue of Hong Kong kung fu hero Bruce Lee.

## Neighborhoods & Districts

### Aberdeen

The busy harbor on the southwest coast of Hong Kong Island is a popular tourist attraction—it's packed with fishing boats and pleasure junks, and is home to Jumbo Kingdom, which includes the Jumbo Floating Restaurant. You can take a ride on a sampan—a wooden water taxi—around the harbor. Ringed by high-rises, the harbor is hardly bucolic; for a more picturesque fishing harbor, try the island of Cheung Chau.

### Victoria Peak

Victoria Peak  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2522-0922 for tram information

<http://www.thepeak.com.hk>

A visit to Victoria Peak (generally referred to as "the Peak") is a must-do on any itinerary, as it offers unrivaled views of Hong Kong Island, Victoria Harbour and Kowloon. The Peak is Hong Kong's most fashionable address—and priciest real estate—where, during the colonial period, *taipans* (foreign businesspeople) had summer homes to escape the heat below.

The trip up begins with a ride in one of the world's steepest funicular railways, rising 1,224 ft/373 m. It seems, from below, to be a perilous—if not impossible—journey straight up the side of a mountain, but the tram has an accident-free record since it was built in 1888. Some say it's best to go in the daytime, although others say the night view is more spectacular. (Check the weather before you set out. If you can see the top of the mountain before you board the tram, you'll probably have a good view. If it's shrouded in mist, you may want to delay your trip until clearer weather.) The Peak Tower includes a roof-level viewing terrace (Sky Terrace 428) that offers stunning views of Hong Kong and out to sea. Inside, the Sky Gallery features photos of old Hong Kong. Down below are a host of restaurants and retail outlets plus Madame Tussauds Wax Museum and, of course, the Peak Tram station.



The walk around the Peak is one of Hong Kong's best. Walk up Mount Austin Road (opposite the exit of the Peak Tower Building) for about 10 minutes, passing a children's playground on the left and some apartment buildings on the right. The view there is quite good, although pollution from across the border occasionally reduces visibility. If you're feeling energetic, keep going up Mount Austin Road to the top (about a half-hour walk uphill) to the site of the Government House. A gentler option starts at the Peak Tram Building: Turn right along Lugard Road for a stroll around the Peak, which offers different views at each stage. It takes about 40 minutes, and there is no climbing. Don't miss the beautiful view from the road just past the Peak Cafe. Looking west you'll see Cheung Chau and many of Hong Kong's other islands. This view is most stunning at sunset when the small lights twinkle from the islands and the sun sets beyond the horizon.

The Peak Tram starts from St. John's Building at 33 Garden Road. (You can take a free open-top bus from the Star Ferry Pier in Central to the Peak Tram terminal in the Mid-Levels on the Peak.) HK\$68 one way and HK\$80 round-trip for adults, HK\$32 one way and HK\$39 round-trip for seniors and children, free for children younger than 3. The tram leaves daily every 10-15 minutes, 7 am-midnight. Take a seat on the right-hand side for the best views. The tram makes several stops along the way.

## Parks & Gardens

### Hong Kong Park

19 Cotton Tree Drive, Central  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2521-5041

<http://www.lcsd.gov.hk/parks/hkp/en/index.php>

With space at a premium, busy Central district has little in the way of public parks. Hong Kong Park is a rare exception, offering a magnificent walk-through aviary with mynahs, hornbills and kingfishers, a children's playground, ponds, waterfalls, a small amphitheater and an open-air restaurant.

Open 6 am-11 pm daily; conservatory and aviary 9 am-5 pm daily. Free admission.

### Zoological and Botanical Gardens

Albany Road, Mid-Levels  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2530-0154

<http://www.lcsd.gov.hk/parks/hkzbg/en/index.php>

About a 10-minute walk west of Hong Kong Park up past the Peak Tram station, these gardens are a welcome change from the noise and crowding in Central. The gardens, with 1,000 plant species, are literally a breath of fresh air and a chance to see locals practicing tai chi throughout the day. Animal lovers may not be impressed by the zoo, which opened in 1864 and is one of the world's oldest, as it confines orangutans, monkeys and gibbons in small cages. The zoo also participates in captive breeding programs for some endangered species.

Gardens open daily 6 am-10 pm, zoo open daily 6 am-7 pm, greenhouse open daily 9 am-4:30 pm. Free.



## Recreation

Hong Kongers may work some of the longest hours in the developed world, but they like to play hard, too. There are plenty of recreational opportunities in the city, and many hotels have health clubs with gyms and swimming pools. Golf, windsurfing and kayaking are also popular choices.

The urban parks are crowded on weekends with families and couples taking wedding photos (there is a marriage registry inside Hong Kong Park), but several national parks have huge areas of unspoiled countryside with scenic hills, forests and well-marked trails that make it almost impossible to get lost. All the same, take a mobile phone (you can usually get reception even in relatively remote areas), sunscreen, sunglasses, a hat and, especially on hot days, abundant water. To get to those areas, you have to travel: to central and southern Hong Kong Island (which has six national parks), to the New Territories (15 parks) or to Lantau Island (three parks). Outlying areas are where you'll find the golf courses, too.

In the eastern New Territories, Hong Kong Global Geopark of China spans eight sites, with spectacular scenery formed by rocks including the world's largest formation of columnar-jointed tuff.

## Nightlife

The main nightlife hot spots are Central's Lan Kwai Fong and SoHo areas, Wan Chai and, across the harbor, Kowloon's Tsim Sha Tsui and Knutsford Terrace. Wan Chai's reputation for naughtiness is overblown these days: For every tacky go-go bar, there is at least one stylish watering hole or delightful restaurant contributing to the area's gradual makeover.

Should you feel the need to venture into one of the Wan Chai and Kowloon hostess clubs, beware of the outrageous minimum and cover charges that are used to stiff customers for just one or two drinks. Inquire about pricing policies before going in and be prepared for some heavy marketing upon entering some of the more upscale locales (for example, a waitress may try to interest you in a full bottle of expensive whiskey or bring around other luxury items). Some bars are multilevel, with different offerings on each floor (one complex may offer separate disco and karaoke floors, as well as romantic settings). Pay for each round of drinks as it arrives—running a tab is an invitation to rip-offs.

Many pubs and clubs, especially in Wan Chai, have rather loose closing times, which doesn't seem to concern the authorities. Where closing times aren't specific, assume "late" means when the last customer drops or the bar manager's had enough.

## Shopping

Along with New York and London, Hong Kong has a deserved reputation as one of the world's greatest shopping cities, and sleek malls abound in every corner of the territory. Even though it now has serious competition from neighboring Singapore and Bangkok, the exhaustive variety of brands and goods means it's still arguably the best Asian city to shop till you drop, and the air-conditioned malls provide a welcome solace from the frequently hot and humid weather.

Although there are bargains to be had, not every purchase will be a fantastic deal. Hong Kong is not the cheap shopping destination it once was, though it is extremely popular with visitors from mainland China, especially for luxury foreign goods that are heavily taxed on the mainland. Cash will usually get you a better price than credit cards. (Some shops charge extra for credit card purchases—about 4% on



average.) All major credit cards are widely accepted. Bargaining can be done in most smaller stores but not in larger department stores.

To give you an idea of costs, the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) publishes several free pamphlets with recommended retail prices for a wide variety of goods. Stores displaying the HKTB sticker are generally considered to be more reliable than those that don't. To display the logo, the shops have to meet certain conditions and provide good standards of service. If you plan to have a store ship your goods for you, make sure it's an HKTB member to ensure safe delivery; otherwise the goods may never arrive. (The Consumer Council hotline is available Monday-Friday 9 am-5:30 pm. Phone 2929-2222.)

Shop for electronics in Mong Kok (north of Tsim Sha Tsui) on the peninsula. Sai Yeung Choi Street is the electronics center of Hong Kong, and scores of shops offer good discounts. The Yau Shing Commercial Centre also houses several shops. Be advised, however, that buying something in Hong Kong does not mean an automatic bargain. Although you will avoid sales or value-added taxes, prices may not differ much from what you'd find in your own country; do your homework before leaving home.

Be aware that there are variations between North American, European and Asian versions of similar products; be sure you know the differences before you buy.

Bargaining is the norm: When buying electronics, know exactly what you want (make and model) and know what it costs at home when on sale. Once in Hong Kong, don't buy unless the item costs less, including import duty. Before handing over any money, check that everything works, all pieces are included, the manufacturer's warranty cards are included and serial numbers on the box match those on the product. Also, confirm where your warranty is valid; it will be inconvenient to send something back to Hong Kong to take advantage of a Hong Kong-only warranty.

Hong Kong merchants are not obligated by law to exchange items or give refunds. For the best prices, pay in cash. If you use a card, the merchant is entitled to charge you the service fee your card charges, usually about 4%.

Most of the electronic goods sold in Hong Kong have a universal switch enabling you to adjust the voltage to the requirements of the country where you use it. Customers from countries using 110 volts will want to confirm that their purchase will be usable back home. The Hong Kong Tourism Board's booklet, *Shopping Guide to Consumer Electronics*, lists recommended electronics dealers.

**Shopping Hours:** Shops are generally open daily 10 am-10 pm almost everywhere, and in the busy retail areas of Causeway Bay on Hong Kong Island, Tsim Sha Tsui and Mong Kok in Kowloon, some stay open until close to midnight.

## Department Stores

### Harvey Nichols

The Landmark, 15 Queen's Road, Central  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 3695-3388

<http://blog.harveynichols.com.hk>

On an island known for its cramped quarters, London's flagship of chic managed to secure an impressive 60,000 sq ft/5,575 sq m adjacent to the Landmark Mandarin Oriental Hotel, where style reigns supreme. This is not the place for basics, but more like a museum of cutting-edge fashion, though those with



sufficient funds will find plenty to take away. There is a second, larger location at Pacific Place (88 Queensway; phone 3968-2668).

Monday-Wednesday 10:30 am-8 pm, Thursday-Saturday 10:30 am-9 pm.

## Lane Crawford

ifc mall, Podium Level 3, 8 Finance St., Central  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2118-2288

<http://www.lanecrawford.com>

For the very latest international fashions from the hottest designers, Lane Crawford has reinvented itself across 80,000 sq ft/7,432 sq m in the ifc mall adjacent to the Central Airport Terminal, so locals and visitors can pick up the highest heels from Italy and the latest Dior handbag before jetting off or immediately upon arrival.

Daily 10 am-9 pm.

## Sogo

555 Hennessy Road, Causeway Bay  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2833-8338

<http://www.sogo.com.hk>

Japanese department store that sells everything from electronics and furniture to clothing and cosmetics. In the basement, you'll find reasonably priced meals and snacks along with a Japanese supermarket, while on the upper floors there are often themed sales, such as sports goods or beachwear. There is another location in Tsim Sha Tsui (phone 3556-1212).

Sunday-Thursday 10 am-10 pm; Friday Saturday and the day before a public holiday 10 am-10:30 pm.

## The Chinese Merchandise Emporium

Chiao Shang Building, 92-104 Queen's Road, Central  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Traditional Chinese crafts, foods, medicine and great souvenirs.

Daily 10 am-7:15 pm.

## Yue Hwa Chinese Products Emporium

Yau Ma Tei, 301-309 Nathan Road, Kowloon  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 3511-2222

<http://www.yuehwa.com>

Wide range of Chinese souvenirs, such as silk clothing, embroidered cushion covers, toys and ceramics. Offers much better value for Chinese gifts and clothes than the now very upmarket China Arts and Crafts shops.





## Factory Outlets

### Citygate Outlets

20 Tat Tung Road, Tung Chung, Lantau Island  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2109-2933

<http://www.citygateoutlets.com.hk>

Hong Kong's only outlet mall is home to more than 80 international brands including Burberry and Diane von Furstenberg, with discounts of up to 70% available. In addition to designer fashion, there are sports, accessories, homeware and beauty outlets. Approximately 15 minutes by taxi from the airport, it's ideal for a spot of last-minute shopping.

Daily 10 am-10 pm.

## Markets

### Flower Market

Flower Market Road, Mong Kok, Kowloon (just around the corner from the bird market)  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Hong Kong residents descend on this market not only for flowers, but also for its bounty of bamboo, which is said to bring good luck. There are fragrant stalls of exotic flowers and plants, with orchids a specialty. Also little shops selling very realistic silk and artificial flowers.

Open daily 7 am-7:30 pm.

### Jade Market

Junction of Kansu and Battery streets, Yau Ma Tei, Kowloon  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Under a rather depressing overpass, this covered market mainly sells jade, and a little local know-how helps in making sure you get true jade, not glass. One stall (No. 129) sells reasonably priced earthenware teapots; another (No. 192) has small carvings made from Tagua nut (known as "vegetable ivory"); and Grace Lam at stall No. 387 sells inexpensive strings of river pearls, knotted to required lengths as you wait.

Open daily 10 am-4 pm.

### Ladies' Market

Sai Yeung Choi Street, Fa Yuen Street, Tung Choi Street, Mong Kok, Kowloon  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Electronic goods in Sai Yeung Choi Street, plus casual wear. Tung Choi Street is known as Ladies' Market for clothing, accessories, stationery and toys. Fa Yuen Street is more for locals' necessities of life, from food to gadgets.

Most market stalls open at noon and close around 11 pm.



## Li Yuen Street East and West

Li Yuen Street East  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Bargain over women's and children's clothing, shoes, leather goods and Chinese-embroidered textiles, plus silk pajamas and ties. The two streets are located between Queen's Road and Des Voeux Road.

Open daily until around 7 pm.

## Spring Garden Lane

Spring Garden Lane, Wan Chai  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Wan Chai has several small street markets, but this is one of the best, with jewelry, clothes, furniture and other goods on offer.

Daily 10 am-6 pm.

## Stanley Market

Stanley Market, Hong Kong Island  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

This covered market is large and colorful, although, disappointingly for those who love to bargain, most items are marked up, and vendors don't like to haggle. Nevertheless, it's a good place to shop for shoes and clothing, pottery, paintings and home accessories such as cushion covers and chopsticks. In the bargain bins, you can pick up a T-shirt or a pair of shorts for as little as HK\$10. Combine your visit with a stroll around Stanley, a seaside town with old temples and plenty of alfresco restaurants. Head left to the cluster of cafes on the seafront that are cheaper than those on the main drag. The ride to Stanley is terrifically dramatic: Double-decker buses deliver fabulous views of the mountains and beaches. Take Citybus 6, 6-A, 6-X, 66 or 260 from Exchange Square bus terminal (near the Star Ferry Pier), or catch it in front of City Hall and Queensway. The bus takes 30 minutes to an hour, depending on traffic, and stops directly at the market.

Daily until 7 pm.

## Temple Street Night Market

Temple and Shanghai streets, Kowloon  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

This is Hong Kong's most popular market, where tourists come to snap up clothes, sunglasses, suitcases, bags, watches, clocks, jewelry, phones and lots more, all at reasonable prices, even if not premium quality, together with food and street theater that includes fortune-tellers and, occasionally, opera.

Nightly 7-10:30.

## Yuen Po Bird Market

Yuen Po Street, Mong Kok, Kowloon  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong



Some find it fun to browse at this unusual market, filled with birds and bird-related paraphernalia of all types; yet it's a sad place for wild-bird lovers. Many Chinese are fond of birds as pets; they feed them grasshoppers with chopsticks and house them in ornate cages. Because they believe birds bring luck, some take them to the racetrack, too. The price of a bird is partly determined by the quality of the song it produces.

Generally open daily 7 am-8 pm.

## Shopping Areas

### Festival Walk

80 Tat Chee Ave., Kowloon Tong  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2844-2223

<http://www.festivalwalk.com.hk>

The 200 shops in this shopping complex sell everything from apparel to home furnishings, but it's not particularly convenient for the short-stay visitor. It also has restaurants, movie theaters and an ice rink to keep the children amused.

Open daily 11 am-10 pm.

### Harbour City

Canton Road (west of the Star Ferry Pier), Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2118-8668

<http://www.harbourcity.com.hk>

Has the widest variety of shops in Hong Kong—Marks & Spencer, Toys "R" Us and many more—plus a selection of restaurants, snack bars and cafes with harbor views.

Most shops are open daily 10 am-9 pm.

### Hysan Place

500 Hennessy Road, Causeway Bay  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2866-7222

<http://hp.leegardens.com.hk>

More than 100 boutiques spread across 17 floors, including hip Hong Kong clothing brands Chocolate and Venilla Suite plus Japanese boutiques from Superdry and Mukai. There is also a food court and supermarket.

Sunday-Thursday 10 am-10 pm, Friday and Saturday 10 am-11 pm.



## ifc mall

8 Finance St., Central  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2295-3308

<http://www.ifc.com.hk>

This mall includes ultra-high-end fashion brands and haute-cuisine dining options. Conveniently located adjacent to the Central Airport Terminal, ifc mall is the perfect place to spend those last Hong Kong dollars (especially if you have a lot of them) before hopping aboard the Airport Express. Expect a solid selection but no bargains.

Daily 10 am-8 pm (restaurants and bars until midnight).

## Island Beverly

1 Great George St., Causeway Bay  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Trend central for young hipsters, this Causeway Bay address is four floors crammed full of the latest fashions from local designers. Located just off the equally trendy Fashion Walk in Causeway Bay, the entrance to Island Beverly is a little hard to find but well worth the effort.

Most shops are open daily 10 am-10 pm.

## Langham Place

555 Shanghai St., Mong Kok  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 3552-3388

<http://www.langhamplace.com.hk>

A mix of office tower and linked hotel, Langham Place has been something of a center for a renaissance of the surrounding neighborhood. Its 300 shops and restaurants, cinema and the city's longest unsupported indoor escalators—together with its digital sky ceiling—make a visit worthwhile.

## Specialty Stores

Much is made of the fact that a custom suit can be turned out in 24 hours in Hong Kong. It can be, indeed, but it will look like it. If you want clothing custom-made, give the tailor as much time as you can—a week is ideal. Go back for several fittings, and allow time for alterations. Also, when comparing prices, be sure that you're considering comparable grades of fabric.

## A&A Audio and Video Centre

Shop 123 Pacific Place, 88 Queensway, Admiralty  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2845-3670

<http://www.aaavcenter.com>

A good midrange to high-end selection. Pricier than a Mong Kok dealer, but reliable.

Monday-Saturday 10 am-7:30 pm, Sunday 10:30 am-7:30 pm.



## Elissa Cohen

209 Hankow Centre, 5-15 Hankow Road, Tsim Sha Tsui  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2312-0811

<http://www.elissacohen.com>

Diamonds are this Hong Kong designer's best friend. In-the-know locals go to this office tower address for engagement rings and all kinds of exquisite baubles. From earrings to toe rings, Elissa decks her clients out in only the best.

Daily 10 am-6 pm.

## Goods Of Desire

Central Store, G/F and 1/F, 48 Hollywood Road  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2805-1876

<http://www.god.com.hk>

A Hong Kong original, G.O.D. has transformed from underground wonder to having outlets across Hong Kong. Irreverent T-shirts, chic homewares and unexpected souvenirs—all with a Chinese twist—cram into inviting emporiums. Additional locations include 118 Peak Road (phone 2778-3331).

Daily noon-10 pm.

## Linva Tailor

38 Cochrane St., Central  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Set free your inner Suzie Wong with a cheongsam made to measure. Take your own fabric or choose from Mr. Leung's colorful collection. Four days from initial fitting to follow-up, then another two to three weeks to complete the transformation. Shipping available worldwide.

Monday-Saturday 10 am-5 pm.

## Mandarin Oriental Cake Shop

1/F, 5 Connaught Road (entrance on Charter Street), Central  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2825-4008

<http://www.mandarinoriental.com/hongkong/fine-dining/the-mandarin-cake-shop>

This shop, affiliated with one of Hong Kong's finest hotels, sells jars of delicious rose-petal jam made in the hotel's kitchen (small jars cost HK\$198, larger ones HK\$248). The subtle, elegant flavor is indescribably delicious with crumpets or English muffins. Treat someone to an Oriental gift box, which contains oolong tea, mixed spiced nuts, XO sauce and cookies in addition to the jam.

Monday-Saturday 8 am-8 pm, Sunday and public holidays 8 am-7 pm.



## Mountain Folkcraft

12 Wo On Lane (off D'Aguilar Street), Central  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2523-2817

<http://mountainfolkcraft.com>

Sells unusual, ethnic souvenirs in a homey environment: handmade masks, embroidered shoes, jade and silver jewelry, porcelain bowls and Chinese figurines.

Monday-Saturday 9:30 am-6:30 pm.

## Sam's Tailor

Burlington Arcade, Ground Floor, 94 Nathan Road, Tsim Sha Tsui  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2367-9423

<http://www.samstailor.biz>

Tailor to everyone from former U.S. President Bill Clinton to NBA giant Yao Ming, Sam (whose real name is Manu Melwani) is famous for his impeccably tailored suits. In an emergency, he can whip one up in 24 hours (though a one-day turnaround is not recommended).

Monday-Saturday 10 am-7:30 pm, Sunday 10 am-12:30 pm.

## Shanghai Tang

Hong Kong International Airport, Terminal 1, Departures East Hall, Level 7, Shop 7E91  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2261-0606

<http://www.shanghaitang.com>

A kaleidoscope of Sino-inspired novelties—there is everything from tableware to cufflinks—and modern (although expensive) takes on classic Chinese garments, such as lime or hot-pink cheongsams (the traditional long dress with a high collar and slit skirt). There are stores on the Hong Kong and Kowloon side, including the Shanghai Tang Mansion flagship in Central (phone 2525-7333).

Daily 10:30 am-8 pm.

## Sun Chau Book & Antique Co.

Fortune Industrial Building, 40 Lee Tung St., Chai Wan  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Specializes in Chinese books. Walls are lined with Mao's *Little Red Book*, and floor space is overtaken by piles of revolutionary posters calling on the masses to sacrifice for the Communist Party. Unlike most copies available in street markets in China, these scraps of history are authentic and in excellent condition.

Open daily 9:30 am-5 pm.



## Dining

### Dining Overview

Family celebrations, social occasions and business meetings all revolve around food, usually at one of the city's 10,000 or so restaurants. In fact, Hong Kong is so keen on wining and dining that a local greeting translates as, "Have you eaten yet?" Cantonese cuisine dominates, but Hong Kong also boasts plenty of restaurants serving regional Chinese cuisines, from Beijing to Shanghai to Yunnan to Sichuan. Other Asian cuisines—such as Thai, Indonesian, Malay and Japanese—also abound.

Dim sum is a must for any visit to Hong Kong—many Chinese restaurants serve it a la carte at lunch. In older restaurants, waiters push small trolleys around the room, carrying different dishes in bamboo steamer baskets or on plates. Look inside the baskets and point to what you want; the waiter will serve you and add a stamp to your bill. The traditional trolleys are slowly disappearing, however. Most restaurants now have English-language request forms on which you circle the dishes you want.

Favorite dim sum choices are *siu mai* (an open dumpling containing pork and shrimp), *ha gow* (dumplings with steamed prawns inside) and *cha siu bao* (steamed barbecued pork buns). Try a *daan taat* (egg tart), a Portuguese-style egg custard, for dessert. If you see coconut cake listed, it won't be angel-food cake with coconut frosting, but rather a delicious, creamy pudding, usually served in small blocks that look like tofu.

Dim sum restaurants tend to get rather crowded, especially on Sunday. Most won't take reservations, so get there early and be prepared to wait. If you are concerned about the use of MSG in a restaurant, it's wise to ask your hotel concierge to check ahead and write down in Chinese the fact that you do not want it used in dishes served to you.

The nightlife district of Lan Kwai Fong in Central has several stylish eateries, but it has some competition from SoHo, which has a host of trendy bars and restaurants. Like the New York City neighborhood, its name is derived from its location—in this case, South of Hollywood Road. Take an opportunity to ride the Central-Mid-Levels Escalator, which is the longest in the world (0.5 mi/0.8 km long). A five-minute ride from Queen's Road Central on the escalator delivers you to the hub of the action on Staunton and Elgin streets. Many restaurants are located nearby. There are also restaurants and bars along Wyndham Street just above Lan Kwai Fong.

Beautiful Lamma Island is spectacular at night—many people take private boats to the island and then stop off for a fabulous fresh seafood dinner, where diners can select their meal from huge fish tanks. You can also take the ferry over. Most of the seafood restaurants are at the small village of Sok Kwu Wan, so be sure to get the correct ferry or you'll end up at the busier Yung Shue Wan on the other side of the island. And be sure to keep an eye on your watch—the last boat back to Central leaves around 10 or 11 pm, depending on the day of the week. Specialties vary from restaurant to restaurant, but some of the great dishes are garlic king prawns, deep-fried squid, *garoupa* (a local fish) and scallops.

Cheung Chau—a half-hour ferry ride from Central by fast ferry—also has seafood restaurants, which cater chiefly to locals, so it better suits budget-conscious diners. There are especially popular restaurants along the waterfront north of the ferry pier, with fine views across the harbor to Lantau Island.

Restaurants are generally open for breakfast around 8 am, lunch 11:30 am-2:30 pm and dinner 6-10 pm, but there are many exceptions. Most close for a few hours between lunch and dinner. Hong Kongers



generally eat lunch 1-2 pm—businesspeople keep to a strict hour-long lunch break—and tend to start dinner as late as 9 pm, though families often begin filing into restaurants around 7 pm.

Expect to pay within these general guidelines, based on the cost of a dinner for one excluding drinks, tax and tip: \$ = less than HK\$200; \$\$ = HK\$200-\$400; \$\$\$ = HK\$401-\$700; and \$\$\$\$ = more than HK\$700.

## Local & Regional

### BO Innovation

Shop 13, 2/F, J Residence, 60 Johnston Road, Wan Chai (entrance at 18 Ship Street)

Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2850-8371

<http://www.boinnovation.com>

Chef Alvin Leung may look rock 'n' roll with his tattoos, shades and brightly streaked hair, but his self-proclaimed "extreme Chinese cuisine" concept is entirely serious, pairing luxe ingredients such as black truffles with rice noodles. He divides his menus into "acts," and they can come in eight, 12 or 16 courses. Leung and his restaurant have been featured on the Hong Kong episode of *No Reservations*, the TV show of chef-turned-writer Anthony Bourdain.

Open Monday-Friday for lunch and dinner, Saturday for dinner only. \$\$\$\$.

### City Hall Maxim's Palace

2/F, Low Block, City Hall, Central

Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2521-1303

<http://www.maxims.com.hk>

A huge eating hall with views over the harbor beloved by locals and visitors alike for its dim sum dishes, selected from continually circulating trolleys. Try some deep-fried taro puffs, rice roulade with shrimp dumplings and *char siu bao* (barbecue pork buns). Expect to wait in line with the locals for dim sum on Sunday.

Daily for lunch and dinner. Opens at 9 am Sunday and public holidays. \$. Most major credit cards.

### Hutong

28/F, 1 Peking Road, Tsim Sha Tsui

Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 3428-8342

<http://www.aqua.com.hk>

This upscale restaurant is designed like the hutong courtyard houses of Beijing with sensational views of Hong Kong Island. Serves contemporary northern Chinese dishes such as crispy deboned lamb ribs, cod fillet fried with yellow fungus, and Shaoxing rice wine and scallops poached in chili pepper broth.

Open daily for lunch and dinner. \$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.





## Luk Yu Tea House & Restaurant

G/F-3/F, 24-26 Stanley St., Central  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Fans, spittoons and surly waiters add to the experience of one of Hong Kong's last remaining traditional tea houses. Opened in 1933, this true Hong Kong institution serves Cantonese cuisine throughout the day. Dim sum served daily 7 am-6 pm.

Daily for breakfast, lunch and dinner. \$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

## T'ang Court

1/F, Langham Hotel, 8 Peking Road, Tsim Sha Tsui  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2132-7898

[http://hongkong.langhamhotels.com/en/restaurants/tang\\_court.htm](http://hongkong.langhamhotels.com/en/restaurants/tang_court.htm)

A Michelin-starred restaurant offering fine Cantonese food with healthy notes, if you wish—pregnancy and beauty menus are available. For others, there's sauteed prawns and crab roe with golden-fried pork and crab meat puffs, crispy salty chicken and, to finish, baked sago pudding filled with lotus-seed paste.

Open daily for lunch and dinner. \$\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

## Yung Kee

32-40 Wellington St., Central  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2522-1624

<http://www.yungkee.com.hk>

Marinated roast goose has been Yung Kee's specialty since 1942. Other notable dishes include barbecue pork, dim sum at lunchtime and goose-liver sausage. Only six plates are made per day of blanched pork heart, which is difficult to find anywhere else. Four floors can seat 1,000 guests. Hong Kong's best-connected belong to the ultrahip and private Kee Club upstairs. Favored by late-night revelers at nearby Lan Kwai Fong who are looking for real food.

Daily for lunch and dinner. \$-\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

## Cuisines

### Asian

### Ayuthaiya

G/F, C Wisdom Centre, 35 Hollywood Road, Central  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Lighter, modern Thai cuisine. Try some soft-shell crab rolls or the fried minced crab with egg and celery

\$-\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.



## Felix

Peninsula Hotel, Salisbury Road, 28th Floor, Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2696-6778

[http://www.peninsula.com/Hong\\_Kong/en/Dining/Felix/default.aspx](http://www.peninsula.com/Hong_Kong/en/Dining/Felix/default.aspx)

An essential Hong Kong experience. If the view from the top of the Peninsula Hotel tower and the striking Philippe Starck design take your breath away, the food will bring it back. Feast on dishes that put a classic spin on Asian delights, particularly seafood. (Don't miss the restroom views, which should be on anyone's unofficial to-do list in Hong Kong.) And there's a large communal altarlike bar-table for people-watching.

Daily for dinner. Reservations recommended; be sure to book well in advance. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

## Lotus

5 Staunton St., SoHo  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2543-6290

<http://www.lotus.hk>

Sip char-grilled-fruit cocktails at this bar and restaurant serving modern Thai cuisine. Standout dishes include crispy salmon salad with Chinese watermelon and ginger, ultraspicy peppercorn chicken marinated in lemongrass, and whole whitefish swaddled in young coconut, banana blossom and Thai basil-chili jam dressing.

Open daily for lunch and dinner. \$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

## Nobu

InterContinental Hotel, 18 Salisbury Road, Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2313-2323

<http://www.hongkong-ic.intercontinental.com/dining/nobu.php>

In a rather somber-shaded setting—black river stones by the bar, undulating sea urchin ceiling and bamboo-embedded terrazzo walls—on the second floor of the InterContinental Hotel, Nobu puts a twist on some of the master chef's ideas. There's great sushi, of course, crispy seabass tacos, pork belly with spicy miso and pickled radish and a caffeine lover's dessert delight of Suntory whiskey iced cappuccino.

\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

## Tokio Joe

16 Lan Kwai Fong, Ground Floor, Central  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2525-1889

<http://www.lkfe.com/en/our-venues/tokio-joe.html>



Still going strong after more than 10 years and serving the most creative sushi rolls this side of Tokyo, plus favorites including spicy toro tartare and rock shrimp salad. Convenient location—not inexpensive, but reliable—chic and always serving food fresh from the sea.

Daily for lunch and dinner. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

## Zuma

The Landmark, 15 Queen's Road, Level 5 and 6, Central  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 3657-6388

<http://www.zumarestaurant.com>

Presents the traditional Japanese *izakaya* style of informal dining, with a sushi counter and grill, and an open kitchen. Try the baby chicken oven-roasted with cedar wood, and sample a martini-style cocktail of rhubarb-infused sake and 42 Below Vodka with fresh passion fruit.

Open daily for lunch and dinner. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$.

## French

### Agnes b. Le Pain Grille

Shop 1, G/F, 111 Leighton Road, Causeway Bay  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2805-0798

<http://www.agnesb-lepaingrille.com>

Authentic bistro chairs, floor tiles and old-fashioned ceiling lamps make this up-and-coming spot feel *tres* Parisien, but it's the menu that seals the deal. For something light, crunch into the salad Nicoise, and for comfort food the croquette monsieur followed by a chocolate soufflé can't be beat. Multiple locations in Hong Kong.

Monday-Saturday for lunch, afternoon tea and dinner. \$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

## Caprice

6/F, Four Seasons Hotel, 8 Finance St., Central  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 3196-8888

<http://www.fourseasons.com/hongkong/dining/restaurants/caprice>

This is Hong Kong's most expensive table, but it still beats the price of an air ticket for food as good at Paris' best addresses, with Normandy sole and truffled Bresse chicken on the menu. The chandeliered dining salon is only outdone by the private room set with silver-plate chairs.

Daily for lunch and dinner. \$\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.



## Pierre

Mandarin Oriental Hotel, 5 Connaught Road, Central  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2522-0111

<http://www.mandarinoriental.com/hongkong/fine-dining/pierre>

Flamboyant but effective culinary displays are the specialty of this spot atop the Mandarin Oriental Hotel, where menus are masterminded by Michelin-star chef Pierre Gagnaire (the chef has three stars, but the restaurant has one). The food is seasonal and includes menus devoted to black and white truffles. Dishes compete with the views from floor-to-ceiling windows, a video wall of Gagnaire's cuisine and images of wrought-iron work and a mood-light-changing chandelier.

Monday-Friday for lunch and dinner, Saturday for dinner only. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

## Restaurant Petrus

56/F, Island Shangri-la Hotel, Pacific Place  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2877-3838

<http://www.shangri-la.com/en/property/hongkong/islandshangrila/dining/restaurant/restaurantpetrus>

Superlative dining and views from the 56th floor through formally draped windows. The rich setting has sumptuous carpets, crystal chandeliers and French-style furniture—there are even footstools for handbag-parking. The wine list at this Michelin-starred establishment runs to 950 choices, watercress-and-lettuce soup comes with bacon-wrapped chicken wings, and the dessert trolley is full of diet-defeating goodies, including an excellent creme brulee.

Open daily for breakfast, lunch and dinner. \$\$\$\$ . Most major credit cards.

## Spoon

InterContinental Hotel, 18 Salisbury Road, Kowloon  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2313-2323

<http://hongkong-ic.intercontinental.com/dining/spoon.php>

Alain Ducasse's restaurant has two Michelin stars, as well as a ceiling of 550 handblown Murano mercury-glass spoons, mink cushions, rust-leather tables and eelskin-covered French Provencal chairs. Diners are likely, however, to spend more time looking at the excellent harbor views while mixing and matching dishes from the menu. Sunday lunch is HK\$748 and includes a choice of appetizer, a main course, dessert selection in the kitchen and free-flowing wine.

\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.



## Fusion

### Aqua

1 Peking Road, 29-30th Floor, Tsim Sha Tsui  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 3427-2288

<http://www.aqua.com.hk>

Aqua combines a laid-back bar, stunning views of Hong Kong island, two restaurants—Aqua Roma for Italian and Aqua Tokyo for Japanese and superb sushi—and late-night grooves at Aqua Spirit all in one formidable package. The set meals at lunch are a great deal.

Monday-Saturday for lunch and dinner. Reservations recommended. \$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

### Sammy's Kitchen

204-206 Queen's Road W.  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2548-8400

<http://www.sammykitchen.com>

This restaurant in Sai Ying Pun on Hong Kong Island serves local and Western-style cuisine. Its cow-shaped neon sign is well-known to everyone in the area, as it has been serving the community for decades. Try the all-in-one mixed grill of pork chop, steak, chicken and sausage, or the tasty stir-fried Chinese noodles.

### Tsui Wah Restaurant

15 Wellington St., Central  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2525-6338

[http://www.tsuiwahrestaurant.com/eng/history\\_e.html](http://www.tsuiwahrestaurant.com/eng/history_e.html)

Chain of bustling cafes, with Hong Kong-style food that reflects Western and regional influences. Signature dishes include a toasted bun with condensed milk, along with Hong Kong-style milk tea. Also has a range of heartier fare, such as Malaysian curries and noodle soup with fish balls.

Open daily till late. \$. Most major credit cards.

## Italian

### 208 Duecento Otto

208 Hollywood Road, Sheung Wan  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2549-0208

<http://www.208.com.hk>

This chic, beautifully appointed venue is decked out with blue and white ceramic tiles and warm wooden ceilings and floors. Set on two levels, the bar serves excellent cocktails (try a Bellini or a rosemary saketini) while rustic Italian food, including authentic Napoletana pizza, are served in the dining room upstairs.



Open daily for brunch, lunch and dinner. \$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

## Angelini

Kowloon Shangri-la, 64 Mody Road, Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2733-8750

<http://www.shangri-la.com/en/hongkong/kowloonshangrila/dining>

Chef Marco Medaglia's signature dishes include seabass tartare, Sicilian red prawn and caviar, and house-made candy pasta with mascarpone, which are complemented by fine olive oils, herbs, sea salts and breads. There are good views of the harbor at this contemporary-style restaurant divided into three by its floor coverings: carpet, stone or wood. At lunch there's a buffet of appetizers, and sharing platters are available.

Open daily for lunch and dinner. \$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

## Fat Angelo's

Shop F, G/F, 1 Belcher's St., Kennedy Town  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2818-7300

<http://www.fatangelos.com>

A fun, cheerful place that offers hearty servings at reasonable prices, though the food isn't going to win any gastronomical awards. Baked clams, salmon fettuccine and stuffed peppers are good choices. There are two other locations in Hong Kong: Tsim Sha Tsui (phone 2730-4788) and Tsuen Wan (phone 2409-8448).

Daily for lunch and dinner; open until late. \$-\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

## Gaia

G/F, The Piazza, Grand Millennium Plaza, 181 Queen's Road, Central  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2167-8200

<http://www.gaiagroup.com.hk>

This restaurant has a reputation for serving super-thin, Roman-style pizzas and a daily antipasto buffet, all the more enjoyable on days when the dining terrace is open.

Open daily for lunch and dinner. Reservations recommended. \$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

## Lupa

3/F, LHT Tower, 31 Queen's Road, Central  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2796-6500

<http://www.diningconcepts.com.hk>



Mario Batali's Hong Kong outpost of his popular New York Italian trattoria—dishes include beef cheek ravioli and sea bass with Sambuca and fennel—also features one of the largest terraces in Hong Kong at 2,500 sq ft/232 sq m where a well-heeled clientele relaxes over Negronis.

Daily for lunch and dinner. \$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

## Va Bene

17-22 Lan Kwai Fong, Central  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2845-5577

<http://www.gaiagroup.com.hk>

One of the oldest restaurants in Lan Kwai Fong, this sleek, minimalist option is still going strong in a newer location around the corner from the original. Vegetables grilled in olive oil are especially succulent, and a peek through the street-level front windows will confirm that the pastas are an everyday favorite.

Open Monday-Friday for lunch and dinner; Saturday, Sunday and public holidays for dinner only. Reservations required. \$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

## Continental

### Gaddi's

Peninsula Hotel, Salisbury Road, Tsim Sha Tsui  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2315-3171

[http://www.peninsula.com/Hong\\_Kong/en/Dining/default.aspx](http://www.peninsula.com/Hong_Kong/en/Dining/default.aspx)

This formal dining room of the Peninsula Hotel has been serving classic European menus—think lobster in Armagnac butter and roasted pigeon with Muscovado crust—for more than 50 years, and it remains a popular spot for marriage proposals and sealing big business deals alike.

Open daily for lunch and dinner. \$\$\$\$.

## Mandarin Grill + Bar

Mandarin Oriental Hotel, 5 Connaught Road, Central  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2825-4004

<http://www.mandarinoriental.com/hongkong/dining>

This is where the city's movers and shakers seal their deals over a swift, one-hour lunch. The formerly rather dark and masculine grill is now light, airy and buzzy—not to mention Michelin-starred. You can breakfast there, too—with the full English, if you wish—or lunch lightly at the Crustacean Bar. Chef Uwe Opocensky, an expert in molecular cookery, presents the beef calotte inside a Mandarin Oriental cookbook.

Open Monday-Friday for breakfast, lunch and dinner; Saturday and Sunday for dinner only. \$\$\$\$.



## The Black Sheep

330 Shek O Village  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

An out-of-the-way, hole-in-the wall restaurant serving Continental dishes near the beach in one of Hong Kong's most charming seaside locations—although at HK\$160 for a medium-sized pizza, it's a little pricey for what it is. At dusk, staff members light large church candles that reflect off a collection of cherubs and glitter balls. Don't miss the French onion soup or the artichoke salad.

Tuesday-Sunday for lunch and dinner. \$-\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

## The Verandah

1/F, 109 Repulse Bay Road (in the Repulse Bay Hotel)  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2292-2822

<http://www.therepulsebay.com>

One of Hong Kong's most romantic dining experiences, the Verandah is the place for a special occasion. Classic Continental cuisine is served in exquisite colonial-style surroundings by attentive waitstaff. If you have time, book in advance for Sunday brunch and devour the eggs with caviar, beef or lamb, or traditional English afternoon tea with scones and jam.

Wednesday-Saturday for lunch, afternoon tea and dinner; Sunday for brunch, afternoon tea and dinner. \$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

## ToTT's (Talk of the Town)

34/F, The Excelsior Hotel, 281 Gloucester Road, Causeway Bay  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Phone:** 2837-6790

<http://www.mandarinoriental.com/excelsior/dining>

With a lively band at night, ToTT's also makes a great place for a special lunch with a 270-degree view of Central and the Harbor from atop the Excelsior Hotel. Tables are comfortably and discreetly set along the windows. Dishes are inspired by the chef's world travels and include oven-baked cod fillet with lemon asparagus risotto and chili tomato salsa, and Scottish lamb chop.

Open Monday-Friday for lunch, Saturday and Sunday for brunch, daily for dinner. \$\$-\$\$\$\$. Sunday brunch with unlimited champagne is HK\$668. Most major credit cards.

## Seafood

### Sampan Seafood Restaurant

G/F, 16 Main St., Yung Shue Wan, Lamma Island  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong

A highlight of any Lamma Island excursion, this no-frills restaurant by the water has tanks of seafood waiting to be cooked to order. It handles boat-tour groups as easily as tables for two. The garlic prawns are a delight, as is the lobster in cheese sauce. If you're early enough, the dim sum is a great value.





Daily for breakfast, lunch and dinner but tends to close on weekday afternoons. Very busy on Sunday. \$-\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

## Security

### Etiquette

Although it is now part of the People's Republic of China, Hong Kong has long been a bastion of free enterprise, and its business culture is quite different from that of the rest of China. It remains distinct from North America and Europe, however, in a few idiosyncratic ways.

**Appointments**—Planning far in advance will be to your advantage, so schedule meetings weeks or months before your visit, and reconfirm nearer the date. Punctuality is expected. If you're late, you'll put yourself at a disadvantage, and your Chinese acquaintances may even perceive it as an insult. Call ahead and then apologize profusely if you are detained.

**Personal Introductions**—Western handshaking is widely practiced and is the common form of introduction in Hong Kong. Official titles are important. When the person has no official title, use standard English titles unless you are fluent in Cantonese: "Mr.," "Ms." (unmarried woman) and "Madam" (married woman—the title should accompany her maiden name). The Chinese typically have two or three names: The first is the family name, and that's the one that should be paired with the title (for example, Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa is referred to as Mr. Tung). However, if the person has a Western-style name, such as James Kwok, then you would refer to him as Mr. Kwok.

Have your business cards translated into Chinese at your hotel and present them Chinese-side up. When presenting and receiving business cards, or any other important papers, it is courteous to use both hands—it is offensive to receive or handle it with one hand. Although business-card etiquette is not as formal in China as it is in Japan, you should nevertheless spend time appreciating any card that is presented to you and then place it on the table in front of you or in a card case, not in your wallet.

**Negotiating**—Negotiations in Hong Kong are measured and slowly paced. Your talks will most likely be pleasant but formal. Avoid demonstrating any anxiety, particularly with regard to deadlines. Try to avoid asking questions that will likely result in a definitive "no."

**Business Entertaining**—Social relationships are very important, and much of the socializing is done in restaurants. It's rare to be invited to a private home as most flats in Hong Kong are very small, but if you are, be sure to ask if you should remove your shoes before entering your host's home. Try not to refuse an invitation to dine, no matter where the meal takes place. If you absolutely must refuse, apologize profusely and suggest an alternate time. You will very likely be told where to sit at a dinner or lunch, because your place at the table will indicate your rank. Your effort to use chopsticks will be appreciated as a sign of respect, but the uninitiated can always ask for regular cutlery.

You should pour tea for others and let others pour for you, knocking lightly on the table (with two fingers for someone pouring whose rank or age is greater than yours, one finger if the person is a peer or junior) to indicate thanks. It's polite to leave some of your final course (usually fried rice or noodles) on your plate to show that you have had enough to eat. Once the last dish has been finished, the meal will end abruptly—it's not customary to linger afterward, although you may adjourn elsewhere for a drink or perhaps karaoke.



**Body Language**—There is no physical contact when conversing, but the two participants do usually stand close to one another. Refrain from touching your Chinese acquaintances and keep gestures to a minimum. Winking or pointing at others is considered especially bad form.

**Gift Giving**—Gift giving is a common, ritualistic part of business and personal life in Hong Kong. If you receive a gift, you should give one in return. Gifts are typically given and received with both hands, a thank you and a slight bow. Gifts should be wrapped (but not in blue or white paper). Hong Kong anticorruption laws stipulate that gifts should not exceed US\$250 in value, and it is wise to follow those guidelines. Your associate will not always open the gift in front of you. If you are given a gift, it might be difficult to tell whether you should open the gift on the spot. If uncertain, simply ask, "Should I open it now?" Do not give clocks, as they have connotations of death. In the event you are invited to someone's house, it is considered polite to take a small gift of fruits or chocolates.

**Conversation**—You may politely and superficially inquire about your companion's health but avoid becoming too personal. Polite questions about family are permitted. Travel and Hong Kong culture and cuisine are good topics. There is reluctance to criticize the rest of China or Communist rule of Hong Kong, and you should likewise avoid those topics.

**Other Information**—In Hong Kong as in the rest of China, there is a great respect for age. Your company will be treated with more respect if your lead negotiator is mature, preferably older than age 50.

## Personal Safety

Hong Kong law requires that everyone must carry some proof of identity. Although police rarely approach tourists or visitors for spot checks (the purpose of which is usually to uncover illegal immigrants from the Chinese mainland or Southeast Asia), it's a good idea to carry something with a photograph, such as a passport or driver's license, especially if you are of Chinese descent. Carrying a photocopy is usually acceptable and advised.

Day or night, Hong Kong is a very safe place to walk, but travelers should be aware of pickpocketing and purse snatching, especially in crowded areas such as Causeway Bay, around the Star Ferry Pier in Tsim Sha Tsui, in tourist-popular shopping malls and arcades, and along Nathan Road. Often teams of thieves work together: One causes a distraction while the other lifts your wallet. This type of crime is on the rise, though overall crime against tourists is extremely low.

Be sure to leave your valuables in a safe-deposit box at the hotel and use traveler's checks or credit cards rather than carrying a large amount of cash. Credit-card scams and bait-and-switch schemes are common, particularly in electronics shops in Tsim Sha Tsui that cater to tourists. Don't let salespeople out of sight with your credit card, and always verify that the package you're given contains the product you paid for, not a cheaper model.

Police officers on the beat who speak English can be recognized by a red stripe under their police ID number, which is located on the upper sleeve of their uniform. Even without the stripe, most police should be able to help you with simple matters like directions. A police reporting station is at the Star Ferry Pier in Central.

The police crime hotline is 2527-7177. In an emergency, dial 999.

For the latest information, contact your country's travel-advisory agency.



## Health

If you are out walking during hot months, be sure to take precautions against heat stroke and always stick to a known path. Snakes are common, both venomous and nonvenomous. Mosquitoes also abound so use insect repellent. Feral cattle are usually docile.

Tap water is usually safe to drink, but in some buildings with old pipes, it may be contaminated. When in doubt, drink bottled water. All supermarkets (Wellcome and Park 'n' Shop are the biggest chains) and restaurants carry bottled water. Hotels will advise if their tap water is or isn't safe to drink.

Take care with seafood: It's best to eat it only in recommended restaurants and to avoid seafood sold at street stalls.

MSG (monosodium glutamate) is a food additive that enhances flavor by forcing open the taste buds on the tongue. It is popular in local dishes but can cause extreme allergic reactions such as throat numbing and migraine headaches. Have your hotel call ahead to determine if the chef cooks with MSG or to ask if your dish can be served without it.

No vaccination certificates are required for admittance to Hong Kong. Check with your physician or your country's health-advisory agency before your departure in the event of a change. Hepatitis is common: Consult your physician about taking preventive measures.

The Hong Kong government does not distinguish between residents and travelers in providing health services, insofar as treatment of acute illness and accidental injuries is concerned, and health care overall is excellent. If medical care is required, try Ruttonjee Hospital, 266 Queen's Road East, Wan Chai (phone 2291-2000). It can also provide information on a hospital closer to you if you are not in the Wan Chai District. There are government clinics in all areas but a local doctor's practice is best for speedy service.

All cheap medical treatments in Hong Kong should be regarded with suspicion.

In case of an emergency, dial 999 or call a hospital.

For more information, contact your country's health-advisory agency and Hong Kong Department of Health. Phone 2961-8989.

## Disabled Advisory

Hong Kong is not the easiest of cities for those with disabilities. Most major office buildings, however, and certainly all government buildings, are accessible. There are stairs at many mass transit stations and pedestrian overpasses, sidewalks are crowded and often narrow, and on the island there are steep hills. Some buses have wheelchair access, and the lower deck of the Star Ferry is accessible by wheelchair. Some newer office buildings have elevators, often with Braille panels, and MTR stations have Braille maps and recorded information, along with elevators to and from street level.

For further information, specific questions should be addressed to Hong Kong Tourism Board, 9-11/F Citicorp Centre, 18 Whitfield Road, North Point, Hong Kong (phone 2807-6543). The transportation department issues the *Guide to Transport for People with Disabilities* and also has information on parking and pedestrian crossings.

[http://www.td.gov.hk/en/public\\_services/services\\_for\\_the\\_people\\_with\\_disabilities](http://www.td.gov.hk/en/public_services/services_for_the_people_with_disabilities).



For sports information, contact Hong Kong Paralympic Committee & Sports Association for the Physically Disabled. Phone 2602-8232. <http://www.hkparalympic.org>.

## Facts

### Dos & Don'ts

Do dress for the occasion. Hong Kong is a relatively formal city and, despite its almost year-round heat, top restaurants and clubs ask customers to dress smart casual, meaning no sleeveless shirts, shorts or open-toed shoes for men, and no flip-flops or sandals for women.

Don't forget your umbrella. Except for the winter, when Hong Kong is generally dry, south China weather is highly changeable and can get very wet, very fast.

Do get outside of the city center. There is so much more to Hong Kong than concrete high-rises, although short-term visitors could be forgiven for thinking otherwise. Take a trip to the New Territories, go for a hike through any of Hong Kong's green areas or hop a ferry to one of the outlying islands. You will have a completely different view of Hong Kong if you do. An Octopus stored-value card is a boon for using public transport.

Don't forget to bargain everywhere except at standard shops, department stores and restaurants. Sellers expect it, and their first price is never their best price. If they claim it is, walk away—you can do better elsewhere.

Do leave plenty of space in the luggage you take in with you; it will soon be filled with shopping buys. Otherwise, just buy more luggage.

Don't worry about carrying traveler's checks or wads of cash. ATMs are plentiful around the main business areas and even near most beaches and on the islands.

Do look both ways before you cross the street. Unlike neighboring China, Hong Kongers drive on the left, like their former colonial stewards, the British. Make sure you look and then look again, just to be safe. And watch out for trams crossing Central.

Don't spit or drop litter; both carry fixed penalty fines of HK\$1,500, and there is a fine of HK\$5,000 for those caught spitting on the MTR.

Do take the Hong Kong Airport Express upon arrival into Hong Kong. Determine if your hotel is on the Kowloon side or Hong Kong Island, then hop off accordingly. All information is in English, the scenic ride costs less than one-third the price of a taxi, and the views are terrific.

## Geostats

**Passport/Visa Requirements:** Passports are required of Canadian and U.S. travelers. Visas are required of Canadian and U.S. travelers staying beyond 90 days. Proof of onward passage is required of all. Visas are required of all for visits to other parts of China. Reconfirm travel document requirements with your carrier before departing. Further information is available at <http://www.immd.gov.hk>.

**Population:** 7,182,724.



**Languages:** Cantonese, the dialect spoken in Guangdong province, is the main official language; English is also an official language. Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua) is not an official language, but it is widely used. In theory, English is spoken in all the main tourist areas, hotels and restaurants, although visitors may find that it or they are not always easily understood, particularly in the New Territories or remoter parts of Kowloon.

**Predominant Religions:** Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity.

**Time Zone:** 8 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (+8 GMT). Daylight Saving Time is not observed.

**Voltage Requirements:** 220 and 60/50 cycles. Most hotels have outlets for three-prong, two-prong and standard shaver adapters.

**Telephone Codes:** 852, country code;

## Money

### Currency Exchange

The Hong Kong dollar is an internationally recognized currency, separate from China's renminbi (or yuan). Although the currency is pegged to the U.S. dollar, you may find some variation in the rates actually available. You'll need to present your passport when exchanging money. There is an exchange differential drop between Hong Kong and mainland currency; expect a 30% drop when exchanging renminbi into Hong Kong dollars.

ATMs are plentiful in Hong Kong—you'll find them outside banks, in many shopping complexes and malls, and in MTR stations. ATMs accept many major foreign bank cards and credit cards. They dispense Hong Kong dollars at the going rate of exchange. However, don't rely on just one bank or credit card to obtain cash. Sometimes a card, inexplicably, won't work in an ATM.

Banks often give a better exchange rate than currency exchanges or hotels, but some banks will charge an administrative fee. Check around.

Money changers in side streets around Sheung Wan MTR station (one stop west of Central) offer competitive rates. Be aware that just because some money changers advertise that they charge no fee or commission, it doesn't mean you're getting a good deal from them. They often change at lower rates than banks. If in doubt, walk away and change at a bank; the difference will not be significant unless you are changing large amounts.

Be aware that HK\$1,000 notes are not accepted in many places because of counterfeiting; banks distribute HK\$500 notes.

## Taxes

A 10% service charge is added to hotel bills, along with a 5% government tax in more upscale hotels. There are no sales or value-added taxes or import duties; all of Hong Kong is a duty-free port.

## Tipping

Most restaurants add a 10% service charge automatically, but this doesn't necessarily find its way into the pockets of the waitstaff, who generally expect an additional tip.



Taxi drivers will always happily accept a tip, but most simply mark the fare up to the nearest Hong Kong dollar. Let the driver keep the change. Whatever he gives you back, accept it, that's what he is satisfied with, provided he didn't help himself to a fistful of Hong Kong dollars.

Bellhops, restroom attendants and others in hotels expect a small tip as well, usually HK\$5-\$10 per bag.

## **Weather**

Hong Kong's climate is subtropical, with hot, humid summers that can reach temperatures of 95 F/35 C and humidity close to 100%. Heavy rains May-September make the season a bad time to visit. May-October, typhoons with strong winds are likely. Ferries stop operating once a typhoon signal 8 is hoisted (signals range in escalating order: 1, 3, 8 and—rarely—9 or even 10 for hurricane-force winds), so don't get caught on an outlying island. Signal warnings are posted at ferry piers, on TV and radio, and at the entrances to many hotels and shopping centers.

From October, temperatures drop to the cool 60s F/20s C. The coldest time of year is December-February. Hong Kong does not have much, if any, central heating (just air-conditioning), which can make homes and shops cold when the temperature drops to 50 F/10 C. Clear, sunny days make October and November the best time to visit, though distant scenery may be blurred by smog that is both created locally and that blows south from China.

## **What to Wear**

Take the weather into consideration when you pack. If you're a leisure traveler or plan to have some leisure time, you'll want to take hot-weather clothing for the warmer months (April-October): T-shirts, sandals and so on.

July and August are particularly hot, but all restaurants (and offices) are air-conditioned to the extreme. The difference between the humid exterior and overchilled interiors can be a shock to the system, so summer travelers should include a cover-up in their suitcases. November-March, take clothes that can be layered: The weather is likely to be quite cool, but some days may be unusually warm.

Men customarily wear suits to business meetings throughout the year; women wear suits or dresses. Hong Kong is a conservative culture where business casual has not become the standard. In addition, revealing clothing may be considered insulting and should be avoided in professional settings.