

# one night in bangkok

On a stopover or business trip in Bangkok and not sure where to go? Long-term resident **Ellen Boonstra** leads the way.



Vertigo Restaurant Bar

Sure, the Thai capital boasts a large number of magnificent temples (Grand Palace, Wat Pho, Wat Phra Keaw), but there's an entirely hip and trendy side to Bangkok waiting to be discovered. With a bit of forward planning, you should be able to squeeze in a decent selection of what bustling Bangkok has to offer in the way of up-market shopping, delectable international cuisine and chic nightlife.

## Shop till You Drop

Get those early morning emails, phone calls and exercise out of the way and hit the shopping malls at 10am sharp, because you've only got 12 hours till closing time and a lot of ground to cover. Over the past couple of years, Bangkok has seen a wave of upscale mega-malls sprout up, each vying to outdo the other in glamour and magnitude. Current leader of the pack is Siam Paragon ("the pride of Bangkok") with every imaginable fashion and luxury brand available; it also houses South-East Asia's largest aquarium

Siam Ocean World which kids will love ([www.siamocean-world.co.th](http://www.siamocean-world.co.th)).

Coming in a close second is CentralWorld, which is touted as Southeast Asia's biggest mall and also offers a variety of international designer brands. For more niche-targeted malls try Gaysorn for ultra-exclusive brands and one-off designer boutiques, Siam Center and Siam Discovery Center for local Thai brands and young designers and MBK (Mah Boon Krong) for mobile phones, gadgets, DVDs, software, inexpensive clothing and imitation goods. Around the corner from CentralWorld is IT mall Pantip Plaza, the paradise for pirated software and DVDs. All the shopping centers mentioned above are located in close proximity to one

another in the central Chidlom/Siam Square area, and are easily accessible via Bangkok's ever efficient skytrain system (BTS).

If you're longing for the more 'ancient' Siam with quaint markets and street vendors, these are colorfully present in abundance. Best-known is Chatuchak Weekend Market, Asia's largest outdoor market. It's famously stated that, "If they don't sell it there, it's not in Thailand." Crowded markets can get very hot

during the day, even for those acclimatized to the heat, making Suan Lum Night Bazaar (open daily 6pm - midnight) a pleasant alternative. This market is ideal for picking up last-minute souvenirs such as silk cushion covers and scarves, and funky locally-designed clothing and

jewelry, as well as a large variety of home décor and gift items.

Another interesting option is Pratunam. Open daily from morning to late afternoon, you can find pretty much anything here from electronic gadgetry, t-shirts and children's clothes, to formal evening wear and some of the most bizarre outfits (the place if you're looking for a Halloween costume) - all at rock bottom prices.

## Bangkok's Best Brunches

Crepes & Co (Sukhumvit Soi 12) is arguably the city's most popular Sunday brunch spot (reservations strongly recommended). Open from 9am to midnight, this creperie features a wide selection of pancakes, salads and Mediterranean dishes, which can also be enjoyed in the restaurant's lush garden. Picky eaters can even create their own crepe.

Many of the city's five-star hotels offer absolutely sumptuous all-you-can-eat Sunday champagne buffet brunches; local residents favor the lavish

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Siam Paragon





Bed Supperclub



In Bed Supperclub

spreads at Sheraton Grande Sukhumvit and Four Seasons.

If you need to rest your weary feet from shopping in the Chidlom area, consider the Erawan Tearoom (Erawan Bangkok, Grand Hyatt). It serves up traditional Thai favorites like tom yam khung (sweet and sour soup with prawns) and mango sticky rice in the nostalgic atmosphere of a bygone era, with panoramic windows overlooking the revered Erawan Shrine. Try their high tea (2-6pm) for around 150 baht (\$4.75 USD).

#### Dine Well

More authentic Thai cuisine, and easy on the wallet, can be found at Cabbages and Condoms (Sukhumvit Soi 12) where dinner – as the name suggests – includes a free condom (proceeds of the restaurant's meals go towards a non-profit organization). Seating is in a beautiful garden area with lights adorning the trees, giving the ambiance a decidedly festive feel.

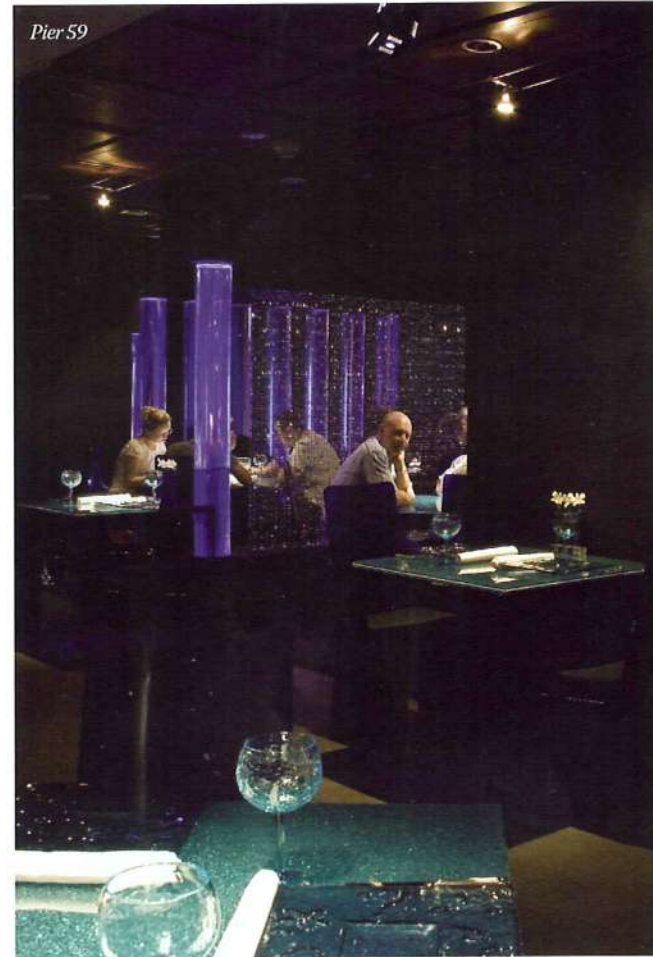
There are quite a few hidden treasures in the midst of the

busy Sukhumvit area, serving contemporary Thai cuisine like Face Bar (Sukhumvit Soi 38), set in an exquisite wooden Thai traditional house; Mahanaga (Sukhumvit Soi 29), with its dining area made up of Moroccan-inspired pavilions surrounding a courtyard; or Wyndham Thai (Sukhumvit Soi 16), with its vibrant décor of contemporary paintings and sculpted lotus flower lights.

The JW Marriott hotel on Sukhumvit Road boasts two of the city's best restaurants: New York Steakhouse and Tsu Nami (in case you were wondering – the restaurant came first). Like the Raffles in Singapore, the grand dame of hotels remains The Oriental, a must-visit if only for its famous Author's Lounge – illustrious alumni include Graham Greene, Somerset Maugham and John le Carré.

#### Nightlife Delights

From the old-world charm of the Oriental hotel it's a short hop to the magical ambiance of Sirocco. This 64th floor open-air rooftop restaurant offers spec-




Pier 59

tacular views of the Bangkok city skyline and Chao Praya River – absolutely not to be missed. Enjoy a balmy Bangkok sunset at the neon-tinted, circular Sky Bar. (Note: the restaurant strictly enforces a dress code of no flip-flops or shorts).

Next door is lounge bar Distil where you can chill out whilst enjoying a single malt Scotch whisky and a Cuban cigar. Vertigo at the Banyan Tree is another wonderful place to for drinks overlooking Bangkok by night.

Centered around Sukhumvit Soi 11 there are several nightspots, most notably Bed Supperclub, the uber-trendy, spaceship-like restaurant and bar where hip Bangkok does anything but lay its head to rest (the menu is one of the best in town; reservations recommended.). Other stylish nightspots include The Met Bar (Metropolitan Hotel, on Sathorn Road), Bar Su (Sheraton Grande Sukhumvit hotel) and the Syn Bar (Nai Lert Park hotel on Wireless Road).

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## how to get there

#### Thai Airways International

65 Nguyen Du, D1  
Tel: 8292809

#### Vietnam Airlines

116 Nguyen Hue, D1  
Tel: 8320320

#### Pacific Airlines

112 Hong Ha, Tan Binh Dist  
Tel: 8450092

#### Bangkok Airway

Room 103, 1st floor, 37 Ton Duc Thang, D1  
Tel: 9104490

#### Air France

130 Dong Khoi, D1  
Tel: 8290981

#### Lufthansa Airway

19-25 Nguyen Hue, D1  
Tel: 8298529

## hotel & travel

### HO CHI MINH CITY

#### DELUXE

##### Caravelle Hotel

19 Lam Son Square, D1 Tel: 823 4999  
[www.caravellehotel.com](http://www.caravellehotel.com)  
Part of the Furama group, this is one of Saigon's prestigious venues. It also features a casino, Asian Reflections Restaurant and one of the most pleasant night spots in town, the 10th-floor Saigon Saigon Bar.

##### Duxton Hotel

63 Nguyen Hue, D1 Tel: 822 2999  
[www.duxton.com/ho](http://www.duxton.com/ho)  
Four-star boutique hotel located in downtown Saigon. Has all the standard facilities of a hotel of its ilk including the Zanadu Health Club, a gym, outdoor swimming and a main restaurant, The Grill, that does good buffets and excellent meat cuts served hot off the grill.

##### Equatorial

242 Tran Binh Trong, D5 Tel: 839 7777  
[www.equatorial.com/hcm](http://www.equatorial.com/hcm)  
Well-regarded five-star hotel located to the west of town, with a wide selection of restaurants offering different Western and Asian cuisines and a good health club.

##### Legend Hotel

2A-4A Ton Duc Thang, D1 Tel: 823 3333  
Five-star venue by the river with a highly-rated fitness centre, outdoor pool, kid's play centre and a jazz bar.

##### New World

76 Le Lai, D1 Tel: 822 8888  
[www.newworldvietnam.com](http://www.newworldvietnam.com)  
The first serious luxury hotel to be built in Ho Chi Minh City, the decade old New World has been overtaken by some flashier venues, but still offers business travellers an excellent range of facilities in a good location near downtown.

##### Omni

253 Nguyen Van Troi, Phu Nhuan  
Tel: 844 9222  
[www.marcopolohotels.com/saigon](http://www.marcopolohotels.com/saigon)  
Despite its non-central location, for a long time the Omni was the undisputed leader among Saigon hotels. Offers superior facilities and services with three excellent restaurants, a Californian-style cafe and a casino. Free shuttle bus into town.

##### Park Hyatt

2 Lam Son Square, D1  
Tel: 824 1234  
[www.saigon.park.hyatt.com](http://www.saigon.park.hyatt.com)  
Luxury colonial-style hotel adjacent to the opera house includes 21 suites, a lobby lounge with live music, two restaurants, a pool, a spa and a fitness centre. Aimed at business travellers and the high-end leisure market.

##### Renaissance Riverside

8-15 Ton Duc Thang, D1 Tel: 822 0033  
[www.renaissancehotels.com](http://www.renaissancehotels.com)  
Well-appointed five-star hotel down by the Saigon River with 349 deluxe rooms and suites offering panoramic views of both central Saigon and the river. Includes conference and banqueting facilities, a rooftop pool, a gym and two restaurants – The Kabin and the Riverside Cafe.

##### Sheraton

88 Dong Khoi, D1 Tel: 827 2828

[www.sheraton.com/saigon](http://www.sheraton.com/saigon)

Strategically-located in the heart of Saigon's business and commercial district, and regarded as one of the best luxury hotels in town. On the premises are the Level 23 bar, a number of restaurants including the Chinese-themed Li Bai and The Signature on the 23rd floor plus the newly opened Mojo cafe.

##### Sofitel Plaza Hotel

17 Le Duan, D1 Tel: 824 1555  
[www.sofitel.com](http://www.sofitel.com)  
Located in the business district close to Notre Dame Cathedral and Reunification Palace, the Sofitel remains one of Saigon's top hotels. Facilities include Wi-Fi in all the rooms, two restaurants with international, French and Mediterranean cuisine, two bars, six conference rooms, an outdoor swimming pool and a fitness centre.

##### Windsor Plaza

18 An Duong Vuong Street, D5  
Tel: 833 6688  
[services@windsorplazahotel.com](mailto:services@windsorplazahotel.com)  
[www.windsorplazahotel.com](http://www.windsorplazahotel.com)  
The tallest building in District 5 and one of the main shopping hubs in the area, The Windsor Plaza is home to the newest five-star hotel in Vietnam, with everything under one roof – four restaurants, a modern discotheque, a club, a conference centre, a soon-to-be-opened casino, a health club, a shopping centre, a supermarket, a post office, two banks and great views from the top.

#### INTERNATIONAL

##### Continental

132-134 Dong Khoi, D1 Tel: 829 8201  
[www.continental-saigon.com](http://www.continental-saigon.com)  
Operating in various guises for over 100 years, the Continental still holds its own among the city's international standard hotels, with good service and facilities in the best location in town.

##### Hotel Majestic

1 Dong Khoi St, D1 Tel: 829 5517  
[www.majesticsaigon.com.vn](http://www.majesticsaigon.com.vn)  
Classic colonial-style downtown hotel with views over the river, recently renovated to full four-star status. Good health club includes fitness centre, spa and a swimming pool with an attached bar. Eight F&B outlets. Noteworthy: The 24-hour ground-floor Cyclo Bar with its evocative feel of old Saigon. Good buffet lunches.

##### Norfolk Hotel

117 Le Thanh Ton, D1  
Tel: 829 5368  
The premier mid-range hotel in the 1990s, the Norfolk still exudes an atmosphere of solid value for money in a good downtown location. Its top floor bar hosts numerous expatriate business get-togethers. Book in advance.

##### Rex Hotel

119 Nguyen Hue, D1 Tel: 829 2185  
[www.rexhotelvietnam.com](http://www.rexhotelvietnam.com)  
The ageing dowager of the Ho Chi Minh City hotel scene, its best feature being the well-known fifth floor open-air bar. By booking online, you can get rooms from as little as US\$65, but with the fierce competition around, that hardly stacks up as a bargain.

#### MID-RANGE

##### Chancery Saigon Hotel

196 Nguyen Thi Minh Khai Street, D3  
Tel: 930 4088  
[www.chancerysaigonhotel.com](http://www.chancerysaigonhotel.com)



Clean and comfortable self-styled boutique hotel just outside central Saigon with rooms starting at US\$45 a night. Facilities include two restaurants, a bar, a business and conference centre and a health club.

##### Indochine

40-42 Hai Ba Trung, D1  
Tel: 822 0082  
[www.indochinehotel.com](http://www.indochinehotel.com)  
Convenient, clean, attractive and secure mini-hotel near the main restaurant and bar area. Limited facilities, but good service and friendly staff.

##### Mogambo Mini Hotel

20 Bis Thi Sach, D1  
Tel: 825 1311  
Better known as Saigon's original American-run bar/restaurant, Mogambo has 10 rooms upstairs for a good price, good for people who like steaks and beer but don't like walking.

##### Saigon Boutique Hotel

57 Pham Viet Chan, D1  
[www.saigonboutiquehotel.com](http://www.saigonboutiquehotel.com)  
New to the hotel scene, this place offers a good standard of accommodation with all the character and charm of a guesthouse. Rooms are attractively decorated with antiques and artworks by local artists display throughout the hotel. Touches include free Wi-Fi, a pleasant bar and lounge and multi-lingual staff.

##### Spring Hotel

44-46 Le Thanh Ton, D1  
Tel: 829 7362  
A great option if value for money is on your agenda. The cosy, spotless rooms at this small hotel are attractively designed and well kitted out with all essential amenities. The décor in the public areas is full of character and the staff are friendly and helpful.

#### BUDGET

##### Duc Vuong Hotel

195 Bui Vien, D1  
Tel: 920 6992  
[www.ducvuonghotel.com](http://www.ducvuonghotel.com)  
Well-appointed budget hotel on the edge of the backpackers' area with friendly staff, good service and clean rooms with all the mod cons. Room rates start from US\$20 for a standard. All rooms have free Wi-Fi.

##### Hong Hoa

185/28 Pham Ngu Lao, D1  
Tel: 836 1915  
Located in the backpackers' area, this little place is clean, comfortable and attractively designed. The rooms are well-appointed and full of character while the rate includes free internet access. The staff also help you out in the direction of reliable hotels nearby when they are full.

##### Tram Anh Guesthouse

185/24 Pham Ngu Lao, D1  
Tel: 837 1004  
One of the best family-run budget hotels in the backpackers' area. Spacious air-conditioned rooms with nice balconies overlooking the alleyways and satellite TV all at a very affordable price.

#### dalat

##### Empress Hotel

5 Nguyen Thai Hoc, Dalat  
Tel: 063 833 888  
A popular but affordable mid-range hotel built on the side of a hill and literally a stone's throw away from Dalat's famed Xuan Huong Lake. The 19 rooms and suites surround a courtyard and most have a view of the lake. Prices from US\$45.