

THE 24-HOUR BANGKOK EXPERIENCE

By Nyx Martinez

A single day in Bangkok is just like downing a big bowl of its steamy Tom Yam Soup: a mixture of sweet, sour, salty, fishy, bitter, and raging chili-hot all at once. This buffet of goodies, with its cheap thrills and 25 Baht plates of steaming noodles, is a city all yours for consumption.

Here's a sampling of what to experience with only 24 hours in sprawling Bangkok.

Breakfast

- 1) **Cash to Splash:** Chow down at one of Bangkok's many five-star hotels, like the Grand Hyatt in the heart of Bangkok, or the Bangkok Marriott.
- 2) **Budget Bound:** Take a stroll around the streets, for some rice soup to kick-start the day, and maybe a milky, orangy Thai iced-tea and a bag of fresh fruit.

Getting Around:

- 1) **Cash to Splash:** Car-hire companies can service you starting at around 1500 baht per day. Or, you could take a metered aircon-taxi, but who wants to sit, stuck in the notorious Bangkok traffic all day? Bangkok's best taxis are motorbikes for hire or rental, for just 10 baht minimum, and then the cost of good bargaining.
- 2) **Budget Bound:** Get out of the smog altogether. Grab a day-ticket for the BTS or Skytrain, which has stop-offs in all the city's major points, usually with a shopping mall attached at the exit.

Morning: Culture-Watch

Whatever your budget, you'll want to soak up Thai culture, a world all its own. Just remember the dress code at most temples and palaces, and use wisdom when clicking away on your camera. Here are a few suggestions:

- Grand Palace (Admission: 100 baht)
- National Museum (Wang Na Palace) (Admission: 40 Baht)
- Wat Pho—The Temple of the Reclining Buddha (Admission: 20 Baht)

Lunch:

Will it be fried crickets, or creamy, green coconut curry? You won't have to look far to find delicious and ridiculously cheap cuisine. The best of Bangkok's shopping is on its street curbs. Vendors sell food on every sidewalk with amazingly clean and tidy stalls, reflecting the meticulous Buddhist "way of life" in everything.

Afternoon Shopping:

Chatuchak Market, Patpong Road, Computer Software at Phantip Plaza, MBK Mall, Emporium Mall...eat your heart—and your wallet out!

Yes, we know that Bangkok abounds with malls, but let's hope your day happens on a weekend, because the Chatuchak Market is a maze of over 100 hectares of stalls. Anything and everything you could possibly want to buy. From ethnic prints and pillows, to tattoo stalls and mountains of shoes. And the best thing is the bargaining. Whether you are splurging Bahts or pinching Satangs, you'll wish you boarded the incoming flight with completely empty baggage; shopping is so good you'll be carrying kilos of it back home.

Late Afternoon Spa:

- 1) Cash to Splash: Any spa in Thailand is cheap compared with spas in Western countries, the popular ones being aromatherapy and holistic treatments, facials and chemical peels. In upscale spas, expect to spend 1000-4,000 Baht.
- 2) Budget Bound: Any Street Massage Parlor at 150 Baht per hour
Make sure you know what you're in for before signing up for a Thai massage—you'll get a lot of stretching, poking, and maybe discover some veins you never knew you had. As the little masseuse prods your joints deeply, you'll be amazed at her strength and maybe once in awhile ask yourself it was supposed to relax or kill you.

Evening Party: Bangkok's nightlife

One night in Bangkok is all you need! It pulsates with the sound of discos, hip-hop clubs, laid-back bars and night-owls on the prowl.

- 1) Cash to Splash: Entrance to more trendy clubs like Bed Supperclub in Sukhumvit charge 600 Baht entrance and average 200 Baht per cocktail.
- 2) Budget Bound: Khao San Road fills with night-crawlers when the sun goes down. Bars back to back line the streets filled with backpackers. It's full of neon color, and a little something for everyone.

Yes, Bangkok is, for both locals and visitors, a soup to the senses—in the midst of a sweaty, muggy day, it is all color and cool, chili and chocolate. You can wash it down with rice, poke at it with chopsticks, or slurp it straight from the bowl.

One thing is certain: It *always* hits the spot.
