

EATING

top picks

- **Chote Chitr** (p155) Thai
- **Cy'an** (p161) International
- **Face** (p166) Thai and Indian
- **Gianni Ristorante** (boxed text, p160) Italian

HISTORY & CULTURE

In Thailand, food is culture, and vice versa. Appreciation of the national cuisine is so central to their cultural identity that Thais often assume that foreigners are unable to partake in it unless they have been trained in the difficult art of feeling exhilarated over a bowl of well-prepared *küaytiaw* (noodle soup). You will not be asked simply whether you like to eat Thai food, but *'Kin aahāan thai pen mái?'* ('Do you know how to eat Thai food?').

Nowhere else is this reverence for food more evident than in Bangkok. The city's characteristic odour is a unique blend of noodle stalls and car exhaust, and in certain parts of town, restaurants appear to form the majority of businesses, often flanked by streetside hawkers stalls and mobile snack vendors. To the outsider, the life of an average Bangkokian can appear to be little more than a string of meals and snacks punctuated by the odd stab at work, not the other way around. If you can adjust your guttural clock to fit this schedule, we're confident your stay in Bangkok will be a delicious one indeed.

Just about every regional Thai cooking style is available in Bangkok, although much like the region's language and culture, central Thai cooking has come to be regarded as the mainstream of Thai cuisine. Thus, central Thai-style dishes such as *tôm yam* or *kaeng khiaw wāan* (green curry) can be found across

the country – and nowadays even across the globe. This school of cooking is characterised by a fondness for sweet flavours, ample use of coconut cream, a palpable Chinese influence, and an emphasis on presentation, possibly the result of the 'royal' cuisine of the capital's palaces.

Other regional Thai cuisines have also helped to shape Bangkok's culinary landscape. Due to the massive influx of migrant labourers, taxi drivers and prostitutes from the poorer northeast, there are quite possibly more Isan (northeastern Thai) eateries in Bangkok than in the entire northeast. As a result, *sôm-tam* (papaya salad) – essentially a Lao dish – is arguably the most popular and ubiquitous snack in Bangkok. The city's southern Thai community largely resides along the ultra-urban stretch of road known as Th Ramkhamhaeng, where one can find bright-yellow curries and authentic Thai-Muslim eateries.

Particularly associated with the Bangkok style of cooking are the various Thai-Chinese amalgams, especially those employing noodles such as *phât thai*, *küaytiaw yen taa fo* and *phât sii-fw*. With well over 25% of the population claiming Chinese ancestry, it comes as no surprise that Chinese is the probably the biggest influence on the Bangkok kitchen. Although Chinese traders had lived along Chao Phraya's riverbanks for hundreds of years, during the royal capital's late-18th-century

shift from Ayuthaya to Bangkok the Chinese were moved to a single area of town known as Sampeng or Yaowarat—the city's Chinatown. Today this is still the best area to find authentic Chinese food, as well as delicious Thai-Chinese dishes. Since most Chinese immigrants trace their ancestry back to southern China, you'll mainly find southern Chinese cooking styles including Cantonese, Teo Chew and Hokkien.

The Phahurat district is home to much of Bangkok's Indian community. A stroll down Th Chakraphet will bring you nose to nose with a rich variety of Indian tea shops, Punjabi sweets vendors, samosa carts and tiny restaurants serving cuisines from nearly every region of northern India.

In recent decades, other cuisines have also taken a foothold in the city. Th Sukhumvit's Soi 3, known as Nana, began attracting a heavy concentration of residents and visitors from Middle Eastern and North African countries in the 1970s. The number of restaurants and food vendors along Soi 3 and adjacent smaller *soi* (lanes) continues to multiply and today there are dozens of different Middle Eastern food venues in the neighbourhood.

Elsewhere, a slight French accent can be detected along the leafy boulevard of Th Convent, off Th Silom, where you'll find open-air cafés, a French bakery and butcher, as well as a wine shop and a French restaurant. An even more established Japanese enclave can be found at Th Sukhumvit, across from the Emporium shopping centre, and at the corner of Th Sukhumvit Soi 12 there is a multi-storey shopping mall colloquially known as 'Korea Town'. Although the contributions of these latter cuisines to the indigenous central Thai kitchen are negligible, they are the latest culinary additions to a city that has been readily accepting foreign food cultures since its birth.

ETIQUETTE

While Thai table manners would hardly ever be described as 'formal' in the Western sense, there are plenty of subtleties to be mastered, and using the correct utensils and eating gestures will garner much respect from Thais.

Originally Thai food was eaten with the fingers, and it still is in certain regions. In the early 1900s Thais began setting their tables with fork and spoon to affect a 'royal' setting, and it wasn't long before fork-and-spoon dining became the norm in Bangkok and later

THE RIGHT TOOL FOR THE JOB

If you're not offered chopsticks, don't ask for them. Thai food is eaten with fork and spoon, not chopsticks. When *faràng* (Westerners) ask for chopsticks to eat Thai food, it only puzzles the restaurant proprietors.

Chopsticks are reserved for eating Chinese-style food from bowls, or for eating in all-Chinese restaurants. In either case you will be supplied with chopsticks without having to ask. Unlike their counterparts in many Western countries, restaurateurs in Thailand won't assume you don't know how to use them.

spread throughout the kingdom. Some foods, such as *khāo niaw* (sticky rice), are eaten by hand everywhere.

The *sāwm* (fork) and *chāwn* (spoon) are placed to the left of the plate, and usually wrapped in a paper or cloth napkin. In simpler restaurants, these utensils are laid bare on the table or may not arrive until the food is served. Some restaurants place a supply of clean forks and spoons in a steel or glass container on each table.

To use these tools the Thai way, use a spoon to take a single mouthful of food from a central dish, and ladle it over a portion of your rice. Then use the fork to push the portion back onto the spoon, with which you place the food in your mouth.

Tàkiap (chopsticks) are reserved for dining in Chinese restaurants or for eating Chinese noodle dishes (see [above](#)). Noodle soups are eaten with a spoon in the left hand (for spooning up the broth) and chopsticks in the right.

Whether at home or in a restaurant, Thai meals are always served 'family style', that is, from common serving platters. Traditionally, the party orders one of each kind of dish, perhaps a curry, a fish, a stir-fry, a *yam* (hot and tangy salad), a vegetable dish and a soup, taking care to balance cool and hot, sour and sweet, salty and plain. One dish is generally large enough for two people. One or two extras may be ordered for a large party.

Dishes are usually served more or less all at once rather than in courses. If the host or restaurant staff can't bring them all to the table at the same time, then the diners typically wait until everything has arrived before digging in. One exception to this rule is if a *yam* or other *kâp klâem* is ordered: these are sometimes served as an appetiser with drinks before the main meal. When these dishes come out with everything else they will be eaten first.

MUITO OBRIGADO

Try to imagine a Thai curry without the chillies, *phât thai* without the peanuts, or papaya salad without the papaya. Many of the ingredients used on a daily basis by Thais are in fact relatively recent introductions, courtesy of European traders and missionaries. During the early 16th century, while Spanish and Portuguese explorers were first reaching the shores of Southeast Asia, expansion and discovery was taking place in the Americas. The Portuguese in particular were quick to seize the exciting new products coming from the New World and market them in the East, thus introducing modern-day Asian staples such as tomatoes, potatoes, corn, lettuce, cabbage, chillies, papaya, guava, pineapples, pumpkins, sweet potatoes, peanuts and tobacco.

Chillies in particular seem to have struck a chord with Thais, and are thought to have first arrived in Ayuthaya via the Portuguese around 1550. Before their arrival, the natives got their heat from bitter-hot herbs and roots such as ginger and pepper.

And not only did the Portuguese introduce some crucial ingredients, but also some enduring cooking techniques, particularly in the area of sweets. The bright-yellow duck egg and syrup-based treats you see at many Thai markets are direct descents of Portuguese desserts known as *fios de ovos* ('egg threads') and *ovos moles*. And in the area surrounding Bangkok's Church of Santa Cruz (p82), a former Portuguese enclave, you can still find *khànmôm faràng*, a bun-like snack baked over coals.

THE CULT OF SÔM-TAM

Pounded green papaya salad, known in Thai as *sôm-tam*, probably has its origins in Laos, but is today one of the most popular dishes in Bangkok. It is made by taking strips of green unripe papaya and bruising them in a clay or wood mortar along with garlic, palm sugar, green beans, tomatoes, lime juice, fish sauce and a typically shock-inducing amount of fresh chillies. *Sôm-tam laao*, the 'original' version of the dish, employs heartier chunks of papaya, sliced eggplants, salted field crabs, and a thick unpasteurised fish sauce known as *plaa raa*. Far more common in Bangkok is *sôm-tam thai*, which includes dried shrimp and peanuts, and is seasoned with bottled fish sauce. Almost always made by women, *sôm-tam* is also primarily also enjoyed by women, often as a snack rather than an entire meal – the intense spiciness provides a satisfying mental 'full'.

Thais aren't fussy about dishes being served piping hot, so no-one minds if the dishes sit untouched for a while. The one exception to the cooling rule is noodle dishes, which are typically consumed immediately.

Empty plates are placed in front of every person at the beginning of the meal, and the diners take a little from each serving platter onto these plates. When serving yourself from a common platter, put no more than one spoonful onto your plate at a time. It's customary at the start of a shared meal to eat a spoonful of plain rice first – a gesture that recognises rice as the most important part of the meal.

For the most part, *tôm yam* (chilli and lemon-grass soup) and other soups aren't served in individual bowls except in more elegant restaurants or those aimed at tourists. You serve yourself from the common bowl, spooning broth and ingredients over your rice or into your own spoon. Sometimes serving spoons are provided. If not, you simply dig in with your own spoon.

Don't pick up a platter to serve yourself. Etiquette requires that the platter stays on the tabletop: reach over to it with your spoon, even if it means stretching your arm across the table. If you can't reach, hand your plate to someone near the platter who will place some food on your plate. Most Thais will do this automatically if they notice you're out of platter range.

Thais are constantly looking out for each other at meal times – making sure no-one's plate is empty – and will usually give you more food than you can eat. Don't be surprised if another diner in your party spoons food directly onto your plate, just like your mother did when you were a child. This is a completely normal gesture in Thai dining custom and carries no particular import other than showing hospitality towards a foreign guest.

Thais want you to enjoy the food, and at some point in the meal your host or one of

your dining companions will pause for a second, smile and ask, '*Àràyw mǎi?*' ('Is it delicious?'). The expected answer, of course, is *àràyw* (delicious) or *àràyw mǎak* (very delicious).

Cigarettes often appear both before and after a meal, but it is considered impolite to smoke during a meal. Thais will often step away from the table to smoke, mainly because ashtrays aren't usually placed on dining tables. It's not customary in Thailand to ask permission to smoke before lighting up, though this is beginning to change in Bangkok society. To be on the safe side, always ask, '*Sùup bǔrǐi dǎi mǎi?*' ('Is it OK to smoke?'). Note that a recent law bans smoking in any public area, bars and restaurants included.

HOW THAIS EAT

Aside from the occasional indulgence in deep-fried savouries, most Thais sustain themselves on a varied and healthy diet of many fruits, rice and vegetables mixed with smaller amounts of animal protein and fat. Satisfaction seems to come not from eating large amounts of food at any one meal, but rather from nibbling at a variety of dishes with as many different flavours as possible throughout the day.

Thais extend a hand towards a bowl of noodles, a plate of rice or a banana-leaf-wrapped snack with amazing frequency. There are no 'typical' times for meals, though in Bangkok diners tend to cluster in local restaurants at the customary noon to 1pm lunch break.

Nor are certain kinds of food restricted to certain times of day. Practically anything can be eaten first thing in the morning, whether it's sweet, salty or chilli-ridden. *Khào kaeng* (curry over rice) is a very popular morning meal, as are *khào niaw mǔu thǎwt* (deep-fried pork with sticky rice) and *khào man kǎi* (sliced chicken cooked in chicken broth and served over rice).

Lighter morning choices, especially for Thais of Chinese descent, include *paa thǎwng kǒ* (deep-fried bits of dough) dipped in warm *nám táo hǔu* (soya milk). Thais also eat noodles, whether fried or in soup, with great gusto in the morning, or as a substantial snack at any time of day or night.

As the staple with which almost all Thai dishes are eaten (noodles are still seen as a Chinese import), rice (*khào*) is considered an absolutely indispensable part of the daily diet. Most Bangkok families will put on a pot of rice, or start the rice cooker, just after rising in the morning to prepare a base for the day's menu. All other dishes, aside from noodles, are considered *kàp khào* (side dishes) that supplement this *aahǎan lǎk* (staple).

Plaa (fish) finds its way into almost every meal, even if it's only in the form of *nám plaa* (a thin amber sauce made from fermented anchovies), which is used to salt Thai dishes, much as soy sauce is used in eastern Asia. Pork is undoubtedly the preferred protein, with chicken in second place. Beef is seldom eaten in Bangkok, particularly by Thais of Chinese descent who subscribe to a Buddhist teaching that forbids eating 'large' animals.

Thais are prodigious consumers of fruit. Vendors push glass-and-wood carts filled with a rainbow of fresh sliced papaya, pineapple, watermelon and mango, and a more muted palette of salt-pickled or candied seasonal fruits. These are usually served in a small plastic bag with a thin bamboo stick to use as an eating utensil.

Because many restaurants in Thailand are able to serve dishes at an only slightly higher price than they would cost to make at home, Thais dine out far more often than their Western counterparts. Any evening of the

week you'll see small groups of Thais – usually males – clustered around roadside tables or in outdoor restaurants, drinking beer or rice liquor while picking from an array of common dishes, one morsel at a time. These are *kàp klâem*, dishes specifically meant to be eaten while drinking alcoholic beverages, often before an evening meal or while waiting for the larger courses to arrive. *Kàp klâem* can be as simple as a plate of *mét mǎmǔang thǎwt* (fried cashews) or as elaborate as one of the many types of *yam*, containing a blast of lime, chilli, fresh herbs and a choice of seafood, roast vegetables, noodles or meats.

Thais tend to avoid eating alone. Dining with others is always preferred because it means everyone has a chance to sample several dishes. When forced to fly solo by circumstances – such as during lunch breaks at work – a single diner usually sticks to one-plate dishes such as fried rice or curry over rice.

STAPLES & SPECIALITIES

Bangkok's central position, and more importantly its wealth relative to the rest of the country, means that spices, seasonings and produce hailing from any corner of the kingdom are easily available. Coconuts from the south, bamboo shoots from the north, *maengdaa* (water beetle) from the northeast – all find their way into Bangkok markets.

Rice

Bangkok sits right in the middle of the Mae Nam Chao Phraya delta, the country's 'rice bowl'. Although Thailand's role as the largest producer of rice was recently taken over by Vietnam, its product is still considered the best in the world. Thailand's *khào hǎwm mǎli* (jasmine rice) is so coveted that there is a steady underground business in smuggling bags of the fragrant grain to neighbouring countries.

Rice is so central to Thai food culture that the most common term for 'eat' is *kin khào* (literally 'consume rice'), and one of the most common greetings is, '*Kin khào rǔu yang?*' ('Have you eaten rice yet?'). All the dishes eaten with rice – whether curries, stir-fries, soups or other food preparations – are simply classified as *kàp khào* ('with rice' – side dishes). Only two dishes incorporating rice as a principal ingredient are common in Thailand, *khào phǎt* (fried rice) and *khào mǒk kǎi* (chicken biryani), neither of which is native to Thailand.

top picks

INTERNATIONAL FASHION PLATES

- **Bed Supperclub (p165)** Futuristic chic with top-notch international fare
- **Cy'an (p161)** Nouveau Mediterranean amid polished minimalism
- **Eat Me (p161)** Bangkok's favourite cosmo maven
- **Hazara (p166)** Indian 'Frontier cuisine' tamed and brought to the city
- **Tapas Café (p168)** Slurp your gazpacho under the gaze of the latest art exhibition.

PERK UP YOUR NOODLE

Much as chicken soup is viewed as something of a home remedy for colds in the West, rice-noodle soups in Thailand are often eaten to ward off colds, hangovers or general malaise. When you face a bowl of noodles and the array of condiments available to season them, you must be prepared to become your own pharmacist, mixing up the ingredients to create the right flavour balance.

If you see a steel rack containing four lidded glass bowls or jars on your table, it's proof that the restaurant you're in serves *küaytiaw* (rice noodles). Typically these containers offer four choices: *nám sôm phrik* (sliced green chillies in white vinegar), *nám plaa* (fish sauce), *phrik pon* (dried red chilli, flaked or ground to a near powder) and *námtaan* (plain white sugar).

In typically Thai fashion, these condiments offer three ways to make the soup hotter – hot and sour, hot and salty, and just plain hot – and one to make it sweet.

The typical noodle-eater will add a teaspoonful of each one of these condiments to the noodle soup, except for the sugar, which in sweet-tooth Bangkok usually rates a full tablespoon. Until you're used to these strong seasonings, we recommend adding them a little at a time, tasting the soup along the way to make sure you don't go overboard. Adding sugar to soup may appear strange to some foreign palates, but it does considerably enhance the flavour of *küaytiaw nám*.

Cooked rice is usually referred to as *khào sùay* – literally 'beautiful rice', yet another clue as to how thoroughly Thais esteem this staple. When you order plain rice in a restaurant you may use this term or simply *khào plào*, 'plain rice'. Restaurants may serve rice by the plate (*jaan*) or you can order a *thõ* or large bowl of rice, lidded to keep it warm and moist, and notched along the rim to accommodate the handle of a rice scoop. *Thõ* may be practical thick-sided plastic affairs or more elaborate engraved, footed aluminium bowls with fancy serving spoons to match.

In Chinese-style eateries, *khào tòm* ('boiled rice'), a watery porridge sometimes involving brown or purple rice, is a common carb.

Noodles

Exactly when the noodle reached Thailand is difficult to say, but it probably arrived along trade routes from China, since the preparation styles in contemporary Thailand are similar to those of contemporary southern China.

You'll find four basic kinds of noodle in Bangkok. Hardly surprising, given the Thai fixation on rice, is the overwhelming popularity of *sên küaytiaw*, noodles made from pure rice flour mixed with water to form a paste, which is then steamed to form wide, flat sheets. The sheets are then folded and sliced into *sên yài* (flat 'wide line' noodles 2cm to 3cm wide), *sên lèk* ('small line' noodles about 5mm wide) and *sên mii* ('noodle line' noodles only 1mm to 2mm wide). *Sên mii* dry out so quickly that they are sold only in their dried form.

At most restaurants or vendor stands specialising in *küaytiaw*, you are expected

to specify which noodles you want when ordering.

The king of Thai noodles, *küaytiaw* comes as part of many dishes. The simplest and most ubiquitous, simply called *küaytiaw mïu*, takes the form of noodles served in a bowl of pork stock accompanied with balls of ground pork, and perhaps a handful of mung bean sprouts. Season your noodle soup by choosing from a rack of small glass or metal containers on the table (see boxed text above).

In recent years, one of the most popular types of *küaytiaw* in Bangkok has been *yen taa fo*, an intimidating-looking mixture of assorted fish balls, cubes of blood, water spinach and rice noodles in a bright-red broth. The dish is probably the biggest culinary contribution by the Teo Chew, an ethnic group originally from southern China that comprises the largest group of Chinese in Bangkok. The *yen taa fo* sold next door to the **Sri Mariamman Temple** (p111), the Hindu temple off Th Silom (known locally as Wát Khàek), is said to be the most authentic.

Chilli-heads must give *küaytiaw phàt khii mao* ('drunkard's fried noodles') a try. A favourite lunch or late-night snack, this spicy stir-fry consists of wide rice noodles, holy basil leaves, meat (typically seafood, but also chicken or pork), seasonings and an eye-opening dose of fresh sliced chillies and garlic. **Jay Fai** (p155) makes the most lauded – and most expensive *phàt khii mao* in town.

Probably the most well-known *küaytiaw* dish among foreigners is *küaytiaw phàt thai*, usually called *phàt thai* for short. Taking the form of thin rice noodles stir-fried with dried or fresh shrimp, bean sprouts, tofu, egg and

seasonings, the dish is traditionally served with lime halves and a few stalks of Chinese chives and a sliced banana flower. **Thip Samai** (p156), a nondescript shophouse restaurant in Banglamphu, is generally regarded as the best place in Bangkok to try this dish.

Two other ways to order Thai rice noodles include *küaytiaw hâng* (dry *küaytiaw*) and *küaytiaw rât nâa* (*küaytiaw* with gravy). For *küaytiaw hâng*, rice noodles are momentarily doused in very hot water to heat them up and soften them, then tossed in a soup bowl with the usual ingredients that make up *küaytiaw nám*, save the broth. *Küaytiaw rât nâa* involves braising the noodles in a slightly slimy gravy made with cornstarch-thickened stock, adding meats and seasonings to taste and serving the finished product on an oval plate. A seafood version of the latter, *küaytiaw rât nâa tháleh*, is one of the most popular versions in Bangkok. *Rât nâa* (or *lâat nâa*, as it's more typically pronounced in Bangkok), the shortened name for any *küaytiaw rât nâa* dish, is frequently used when ordering.

Another kind of noodle, *khànm jîn*, is produced by pushing a fermented rice-flour paste through a sieve into boiling water, in much the same way as pasta is made. *Khànm jîn* is eaten topped with various curries. The most standard curry topping, *nám yaa* (herbal sauce), contains a strong dose of *kràchaay* (Chinese key), a root of the ginger family used as a traditional remedy for a number of gastrointestinal ailments, along with ground fish.

The third kind of noodle, *bà-mii*, is made from wheat flour and sometimes egg (depending on the noodle-maker or the brand). It's yellowish in colour and is sold only in fresh bundles. After being briefly parboiled, the noodles are mixed with broth and meat, typically barbecued pork or crab, to create *bà-mii nám*. Served in a bowl with a small amount of garlic oil and no broth, it's *bà-mii hâng*.

Restaurants or vendors who sell *bà-mii* typically also sell *kiaw*, a square of *bà-mii* dough wrapped around ground pork or ground fish. These dumplings may be boiled and added to soup, or deep-fried to make *kiaw thàwt*. One of the most popular *bà-mii* dishes in Bangkok is *kiaw puu nám*, a soup containing *kiaw* and *puu* (crab).

Finally there's *wún-sên*, an almost clear noodle made from mung-bean starch and water. Sold only in dried bunches, *wún-sên* (literally 'jelly thread') is easily prepared by soaking in hot water for 10 to 15 minutes. It's

used for only three dishes in Bangkok. The most native, *yam wún-sên*, is a hot and tangy salad made with lime juice, fresh sliced *phrik khii nûu* ('mouse-dropping chilli'), shrimp, ground pork and various seasonings. *Puu òp wún-sên* is bean-thread noodles baked in a lidded clay pot with crab and seasonings. Lastly, *wún-sên* is a common ingredient in *kaeng jèut*, a bland, Chinese-influenced soup containing ground pork, soft tofu and a few vegetables.

Curries

In Thai, *kaeng* (pronounced similarly to 'gang') is often translated as 'curry', but it actually describes any dish with a lot of liquid and can thus refer to soups (such as *kaeng jèut*) as well as the classic chilli paste-based curries such as *kaeng phèt* (red curry) for which Thai cuisine is famous. The preparation of all chilli-based *kaeng* begins with a *khreuang kaeng*, created by mashing, pounding and grinding an array of fresh ingredients with a stone mortar and pestle to form an aromatic, extremely pungent-tasting and rather thick paste. Typical ingredients in a *khreuang kaeng* include dried chilli, galingale (also known as Thai ginger), lemon grass, kaffir lime zest, shallots, garlic, shrimp paste and salt. Dried spices such as coriander seeds and cumin are added for certain kinds of curries.

Most *kaeng* are blended in a heated pan with coconut cream, to which the chef adds the rest of the ingredients (meat, poultry, seafood and/or vegetables), along with diluted coconut milk to further thin and flavour the *kaeng*. Some recipes omit coconut milk entirely, such as *kaeng pàa* (jungle curry), a fiery soup that combines a mixture of vegetables and meat. Another *kaeng* that does not use coconut milk is *kaeng sôm* (sour curry), made with dried chillies, shallots, garlic and Chinese key ground with salt and shrimp paste (*kà-pi*). Cooked with tamarind juice and green papaya to create an overall tanginess, the result is a soupy, salty, sweet-and-sour ragout that most Westerners would never identify with the word 'curry'.

Thai curry cuisine revolves around three primary *kaeng*. *Kaeng phèt* (hot curry), also known as *kaeng daeng* (red curry) and *kaeng phèt daeng* (red hot curry), is the most traditional and is often used as a base to create other curries. This curry paste should be quite spicy, with its deep red colour coming from a copious number of dried chillies. *Kaeng phánaeng*, by contrast, is a relatively mild

curry where the heat is brought down by the presence of crushed peanuts. *Kaeng khiaw wāan*, literally ‘sweet green curry’, substitutes fresh green chillies for red, and somewhat unusually, dried spices such as cumin and coriander.

Although Thais are familiar with international curry powder (*hōng kàrii*), it’s employed only in a few Hokkien Chinese-influenced dishes such as *puu phat phōng kàrii* (cracked crab stir-fried with bottled curry powder and eggs). The use of the Anglo-Indian term ‘curry’ (*kàrii*) Thai, is applied only to *kaeng kàrii kài*, the one dish in Thailand’s culinary repertoire that most approximates a true Indian curry. The word *kàrii* also happens to be Thai slang for ‘prostitute’, and is thus the source of an endless series of puns that intentionally confuse cooking with sex.

A few extra seasonings such as *bai makrùut* (kaffir lime leaves), *bai hōhráphaa* (sweet basil leaves) and *náam plaa* (fish sauce) may be added to taste just before serving. Bangkok Thais like their curries a bit sweeter than other regions of Thailand.

Most Bangkokians eat curries only for breakfast or lunch, hence the average *rāan khào kaeng* (rice-curry shop) is only open from 7am to 2pm. It is considered a bit odd to eat curries in the evening, and hence most restaurants (tourist restaurants excepted) don’t offer them on the evening menu.

To witness a truly amazing selection of curries, check out the vendors at the [Or Tor Kor Market \(p171\)](#). In general, the best place to find authentic curries is at a *rāan khào kaeng* such as [Khrua Aroy Aroy \(p163\)](#), rather than a regular restaurant.

Hot & Tangy Salads

Standing right alongside *kaeng* in terms of Thai-ness is the ubiquitous *yam*, a hot and tangy salad containing a blast of lime, chilli, fresh herbs and a choice of seafood, roast vegetables, noodles or meats. Bangkokians prize *yam* dishes so much that they are often eaten on their own, without rice, before the meal has begun.

Lime juice provides the tang, while the abundant use of fresh chilli produces the heat. Other ingredients vary considerably, but plenty of leafy vegetables and herbs are usually present, including lettuce (often lining the dish) and *khèun chài* (Chinese celery). Lemon grass, shallots and mint may also come into play. Most *yam* are served at room

temperature or just slightly warmed by any cooked ingredients.

On Thai menus, the *yam* section will often be the longest. Yet when these same menus are translated into English, most or all of the *yam* are omitted because Thai restaurateurs harbour the idea that the delicate *faràng* (Western) palate cannot handle the heat or pungency. The usual English menu translation is either ‘Thai-style salad’ or ‘hot and sour salad’.

Without a doubt, *yam* are the spiciest of all Thai dishes, and a good *yam* to begin with if you’re not so chilli-tolerant is *yam wún-sén*, bean-thread noodles tossed with shrimp, ground pork, Chinese celery, lime juice and fresh sliced chilli. Another tame *yam* that tends to be a favourite among Thais and foreigners alike is *yam plaa dùk fuu*, made from fried shredded catfish, chilli and peanuts with a shredded-mango dressing on the side. Because of the city’s proximity to the Gulf of Thailand, Bangkok eateries serve a wide variety of seafood *yam*, and at seafood restaurants such as [Kaloang Home Kitchen \(p157\)](#) these are a very good choice. *Yam* may also be made primarily with vegetables, such as the decadent *yam húa plii*, banana blossom salad, at [Chote Chitr](#) (see [p155](#)).

Stir-Fries & Deep-Fries

The simplest dishes in the Thai culinary repertoire are the stir-fries (*phat*), brought to Thailand by the Chinese, who are of course world famous for being able to stir-fry a whole banquet in a single wok.

The list of *phat* dishes seems endless. Most are better classified as Chinese, such as *néua phat náam man hǎwy* (beef in oyster sauce). Some are clearly Thai–Chinese hybrids, such as *kài phat phrik khing*, in which chicken is stir-fried with ginger, garlic and chilli – ingredients shared by both traditions – but seasoned with fish sauce. Also leaning towards Thai – because cashews are native to Thailand but not to China – is *kài phat mét māmúang himáphaan* (sliced chicken stir-fried in dried chilli and cashews), a favourite with *faràng* tourists.

Perhaps the most Thai-like *phat* dish is the famed lunch meal *phat kàphrao*, a chicken or pork stir-fry with garlic, fresh sliced chilli, soy and fish sauce, and lots of holy basil. Another classic is *phat phèt* (literally ‘hot stir-fry’), in which the main ingredients are quickly stir-fried with red curry paste and tossed with

sweet basil leaves before serving. This recipe usually includes seafood or freshwater fish, such as shrimp, squid, catfish or eel.

Stir-fry chicken, pork, beef or shrimp with black pepper and garlic and you have *phat phrik thài kràthiam*, a relatively mild recipe often ordered as a ‘fill-in’ dish during a larger meal. For lovers of fresh vegetables, *phat phak khamáa* (Chinese kale stir-fried with a fermented soy-bean sauce) is worth looking out for, as is *phat phak búng fai daeng*, flash-fried morning glory. For above-average fried dishes, the best destination is the street stalls of Chinatown (see [p161](#)).

Tháwt (deep-frying in oil) is mainly reserved for snacks such as *klúay tháwt* (fried bananas) or *paw-píá* (egg rolls). An exception is *plaa tháwt* (deep-fried fish), which is the most common way any fish is prepared. Many Thai recipes featuring whole fish require that it be fried first, usually in a wok filled with cooking oil (until the outside flesh is crispy to a depth of at least 1cm). Although to Western tastes this may appear to dry the fish out, in Thailand most fish fried in this way will then be topped with some sort of sauce – lime or a cooked chilli-onion mixture – which will remoisten the dish. Some fish, such as mackerel, will be steamed first, then lightly pan-fried in a smaller amount of oil to seal in the moisture.

A very few dishes require ingredients to be dipped in batter and then deep-fried, such as *kài tháwt* (fried chicken) and *káng chúp páeng tháwt* (batter-fried shrimp).

Soups

Thai soups fall into two broad categories, *tôm yam* and *kaeng jèut*, that are worlds apart in terms of seasonings. *Tôm yam* is almost always made with seafood, though chicken may also be used. *Tôm yam kung* (*tôm yam* with shrimp) can be found in nearly all Thai restaurants as well as in many serving non-Thai cuisine. It is often translated on English menus as ‘hot and sour Thai soup’, although this often misleads non-Thais to think of Chinese hot and sour soup, which is milder and thinner in texture, and includes vinegar.

Lemon grass, kaffir lime leaf and lime juice give *tôm yam* its characteristic tang. Galingale is also added to *tôm yam* and, like its friends, is not meant to be eaten, but rather simply to add flavour. Fuelling the fire beneath *tôm yam*’s often velvety surface are fresh *phrik khii núu* (tiny spicy chillies) and sometimes half

a teaspoonful of *náam phrik phào* (a paste of dried chilli roasted with *kà-pí*). In addition to the tart-inducing ingredients, coriander leaf is an important garnish for both appearance and fragrance.

Keep in mind that *tôm yam* is meant to be eaten with rice, not sipped alone. The first swallow of this soup often leaves the uninitiated gasping for breath. It’s not that the soup is so hot, but the chilli oils that provide the spice tend to float on top.

Of the several variations on *tôm yam* that exist, probably the most popular with Westerners is the milder *tôm khào kài* (literally ‘boiled galingale chicken’, but often translated as ‘chicken coconut soup’). The chilli is considerably muted in this soup by the addition of coconut milk.

Kaeng jèut covers the other end of the spectrum with a soothing broth seasoned with little more than soy or fish sauce. Although the variations on *kaeng jèut* are many, common ingredients include *wún-sén* (mung-bean starch noodles), *tào húu* (tofu), *húa chài thào* (Chinese radish) and *múu sàp* (ground pork). [Krua Nopparat \(p156\)](#) in Banglamphu does a few very tasty *kaeng jèut*, and Thai-Chinese eateries such as [Ngwan Lee Lang Suan \(p164\)](#) excel in hot and spicy soups such as *tôm yam*.

Fruit

The omnipresent *phôn-lá-mái* (literally ‘fruit of the tree’, a general term for all fruit) testifies to the Thais’ great fondness for fruit, which they appear to consume at every opportunity. An evening meal is normally followed by a plate of sliced fresh fruit, not pastries or Western-style desserts – no doubt one reason Thais stay so slim, as a rule.

Other common year-rounders include *máphráo* (coconut), *faràng* (guava; also colloquial name for Westerner), *khànún* (jackfruit), *mákháam* (tamarind), *sóm khiaw wāan* (mandarin orange), *málákaw* (papaya), *sóm oh* (pomelo), *taeng moh* (watermelon) and *sáppàrot* (pineapple). All are most commonly eaten fresh, and sometimes dipped in a mixture of salt, sugar and ground chilli. Fruit juices of every kind are popular as beverages. Probably the best, if not most expensive, place to shop for fruit is [Or Tor Kor Market \(p171\)](#).

No discussion of Thai fruit is complete without a mention of durian (*thúrian*), dubbed the king of fruits by most Southeast Asians yet despised by many foreigners. A member of the aptly named Bombacaceae

SEASONAL FRUITS

The watchful visitor could almost fix the calendar month in Thailand by observing the parade of fruits appearing – sweet mangoes in March, mangosteens in April, rambelh in May, custard apples in July, golden-peel oranges in November and so on.

- Chom-phâu** (Rose apple) Small, apple-like texture, very fragrant; April to July.
- Lamyai** (Longan) 'Dragon's eyes'; small, brown, spherical, similar to rambutan; July to October.
- Lámút** (Sapodilla) Small, brown, oval, sweet but pungent smelling; July to September.
- Máfai** (Rambelh) Small, reddish-brown, sweet, apricot-like; April to May.
- Mámûang** (Mango) Several varieties and seasons.
- Mangkhút** (Mangosteen) Round, purple fruit with juicy white flesh; April to September.
- Náwy nàa** (Custard apple) July to October.
- Náwá** (Rambutan) Red, hairy-skinned fruit with grapelike flesh; July to September.

family, this heavy, spiked orb resembles an ancient piece of medieval weaponry. Inside the thick shell lie five sections of plump, buttery and pungent flesh. Legions of connoisseurs as well as detractors have laboured to describe the durian's complex flavour. The durian's ammonia-like aroma is so strong that many hotels in Thailand, as well as Thai Airways International, ban the fruit from their premises.

Sweets

English-language Thai menus often have a section called 'Desserts', even though the concept doesn't exist in Thai cuisine, nor is there a direct translation for the word. The closest equivalent, *kháwng wáan*, simply means 'sweet stuff' and refers to all foods whose primary flavour characteristic is sweetness, although many also have a salty element as well. Sweets mostly work their way into the daily Thai diet in the form of between-meal snacks, so you won't find *kháwng wáan* in a traditional Thai restaurant at all. Instead, they're prepared and sold by market vendors or, more rarely, by shops specialising in *kháwng wáan*.

Kháwng wáan recipes and preparation techniques tend to require more skill than other dishes. The cook spends the morning making up *kháwng wáan*, which are bundled into banana leaves or cut into colourful squares. These are then arranged on large trays and taken to local markets or wheeled on carts through the streets to be sold by the *chín* (piece).

Prime ingredients for many Thai sweets include grated coconut, coconut milk, rice flour (from white rice or sticky rice), cooked sticky rice (whole grains), tapioca, mung-

bean starch, boiled taro and various fruits. For added texture and crunch, some sweets may also contain fresh corn kernels, sugar-palm kernels, lotus seeds, cooked black beans and chopped water chestnuts. Egg yolks are a popular ingredient for *kháwng wáan* – including the ubiquitous *fáwy thawng* (literally 'golden threads') – probably influenced by Portuguese desserts and pastries introduced during the early Ayuthaya era (see p144).

Thai sweets similar to the European concept of 'sweet pastry' are called *khànmóm*. Here again the kitchen-astute Portuguese were influential. Probably the most popular type of *khànmóm* in Thailand are the bite-sized items wrapped in banana leaves, especially *khào tòm kà-thí* and *khào tòm mát*. Both consist of sticky rice grains steamed with *kà-thí* (coconut milk) inside a banana-leaf wrapper to form a solid, almost toffeelike, mass. *Khào tòm kà-thí* also contains fresh grated coconut, while *khào tòm mát* usually contains a few black beans or banana. *Tàkòh*, a very simple but popular steamed sweet made from tapioca flour and coconut milk over a layer of sweetened seaweed gelatine, comes in small cups made from pandanus leaves. A similar blend, minus the gelatine and steamed in tiny porcelain cups, is called *khànmóm thúay* (cup pastry). The best place to try many of these sweets is Bangkok's open-air markets, such as *Or Tor Kor* (p171) or the *Nang Loeng Market* (p170), the latter particularly celebrated for its high-quality central Thai-style sweets.

Coconut milk also features prominently in several soupier sweets with colourful names. In the enormously popular *klúay búat chíi* ('bananas ordaining as nuns'), banana chunks float in a white syrup of sweetened and slightly salted coconut milk. *Bua láwy* ('floating lotus')

consists of boiled sticky rice dumplings in a similar coconut sauce. Substitute red-dyed chunks of fresh water chestnut and you have *tháp thim kràwp* ('crispy rubies'). As at a modern ice-cream parlour, you can often order extra ingredients, such as black beans, sugar-palm kernels or corn kernels, to be added to the mix. Crushed ice is often added to cool the mixture.

Although foreigners don't seem to immediately take to most Thai sweets, one dish few visitors have trouble with is *ai tím kà-thí*, Thai-style coconut ice cream. At more traditional shops, the ice cream is garnished with toppings such as kidney beans or sticky rice, and is a great snack on a sweltering Bangkok afternoon.

WHERE TO EAT

Wherever you go in Bangkok, there is food. *Rót khén* (vendor carts) are deployed across the city outfitted with portable woks, charcoal stoves or deep fryers ready to whip up a quick snack or a sit-down meal. There is so much variety on the streets themselves that you can go weeks without stepping inside a restaurant.

When you make the leap inside, your best options for great Thai food are Spartan closets run by mum, dad, and the kids. Some of the most famous food shops that get written up in the Thai-language press are a few tables shy of being a home kitchen and look more like a carpenter than a palace. For folks more interested in food than finery, Bangkok is the great liberator from tablecloth suffocation and penguin-suit waiters. Even when karma has delivered fame and fortune, the elite don't abandon street eats. Your fellow diners at a famous outdoor stall might have just returned from a semester abroad and are shuttled around town in a chauffeured car. When it comes to good eats, Asia's famous obsession with status takes a back seat. Best of all, in these proven grub shops, unlike in New York City or London, you can eat well for much less than the cost of a car payment.

That doesn't mean you can't dine in decadence. As a cosmopolitan centre, Bangkok loves to spend money and has many stylish spots that cater to a mood, from sky-high perches to riverside pavilions and contemporary minimalism. Italian is king in the fine-dining sphere, with Japanese and Mediterranean-Californian styles not far behind. Those refreshing flavours of citrus and sea-

food translate better into this tropical climate than the heavy sauces of traditional French cuisine, the usual haute contender.

Bangkok also offers a host of homesick cures for its many immigrant communities. Chinatown is naturally a good area for Chinese food, particularly from the southern regions of that country. In a corner of Chinatown known as Phahurat and around Th Silom, Indian residents keep themselves and the culinary traveller well fed. In the crowded bazaar-like area of Little Arabia, just off Th Sukhumvit, there is such fabulous Arabic cuisine that no one would fault you for doing one too many hummus nights. And elsewhere, meat pies, nachos, cornbread, runny eggs – whatever mama used to make – is likely to have been re-created by an expat entrepreneur for those far-from-home cravings.

PRACTICALITIES

Opening Hours

Restaurants serving Thai food are generally open from 10am to 8pm or 9pm, although some places are open later. Foreign-cuisine restaurants tend to keep only dinner hours, although this varies. Thais are consummate eaters and are always within reach of a snack or a light meal, so meal times are quite flexible, although restaurants can get crowded around 8pm.

Muslim-run restaurants sometimes close in observance of religious or cultural holidays, some close on Fridays, while others close on Mondays. Most Thai and Chinese restaurants view holidays as a chance to feed more customers and therefore rarely lock up the metal gates for the day.

Bangkok has recently passed a citywide ordinance banning street vendors from setting up shop on Mondays. The footpaths are so uncluttered on these days that a roadside eater might feel both hungry and abandoned.

How Much?

A bowl of noodles or a stir-fry dish bought from a street vendor should cost 25B to 30B, depending on the portion size and ingredients. Climbing up the scale are the canteen shops that have a selection of pre-made dishes, sturdier chairs and a roof. For these luxuries, you'll probably pay 30B to 40B.

Thai restaurants with an army of servers and laminated menus usually offer main dishes for around 60B to 120B. Add ambience,

air-con and fancy uniforms, and a main jumps to about 120B to 200B. Anything above 300B will deliver you into the arms of some of the city's fanciest restaurants. An exception is the restaurants in top-end hotels, which feature prices close to what you'd expect to pay at any flash hotel in the world.

In most parts of the city, Western food occupies the high end of the scale, costing from 200B to 350B. One obvious exception is Banglamphu, where *faràng* food comes in under 200B a plate.

Note also that nearly all hotel restaurants include '++', which implies an additional 7% for VAT (value added tax) and a 10% 'service charge' on top of your total bill.

Booking Tables

If you have a lot of friends in tow or will be attending a formal restaurant (including hotel restaurants), reservations are recommended. Bookings are also recommended for Sunday brunch and dinner cruises.

Otherwise, you shouldn't have a problem scoring a table at the vast majority restaurants in the city, especially if you arrive during off-peak hours. Following the European tradition (or because of the wretched evening commute), peak dinner time starts around 8pm. The lunchtime crush typically starts around noon and lasts for close to an hour.

Tipping

You shouldn't be surprised to learn that tipping in Thailand isn't as exact as it is in Europe (tip no-one) or the USA (tip everyone). Thailand falls somewhere in between, and some areas are left open to interpretation. Everyone agrees that you don't tip street-side vendors, although some add a little surcharge when tallying up a bill for a foreigner. To avoid getting annoyed about this double-pricing scheme, consider it an implicit tip.

When eating at a restaurant, tipping becomes more a game of finesse. Some people leave behind roughly 10% at any sit-down

PRICE GUIDE

\$\$\$	more than 500B
\$\$	200-500B a meal
\$	less than 200B a meal

Price is for a meal for one person, including an appetiser or dessert, a main course and a drink.

restaurant where someone fills their glass every time they take a sip. Others don't. Most upmarket restaurants will apply a 10% service charge to the bill. Some patrons leave extra on top of the service charge; others don't. The choice is yours.

KO RATANAKOSIN & THONBURI

Despite the riverfront setting, there are surprisingly few restaurants along this stretch of the Chao Phraya River.

DECK Map p56 International/Thai \$\$

☎ 0 2221 9158; www.arunresidence.com; Arun Residence, 36-38 Soi Pratu Nok Yung, Ko Ratanakosin; mains 170-690B; ☎ 11am-10pm; 🚗 air-con 508 & 512, ordinary 32 & 53, 🍷 Tha Tien
The Deck's claim to fame is its commanding views over Wat Arun, but the restaurant's short but diverse menu, ranging from duck confit to Thai-style pomelo salad, sweetens the pot. After dinner, take a drink at the hotel's open-air rooftop bar.

RACHANAWI SAMOSAWN (NAVY CLUB RESTAURANT) Map p56 Thai \$

☎ 0 2222 0081; 77 Th Maharaj, Ko Ratanakosin; mains 70-150B; ☎ 8am-6pm; 🚗 air-con 508 & 512, ordinary 32 & 53, 🍷 Tha Chang
Commanding one of the few coveted riverfront locations along this stretch of the Chao Phraya, this restaurant has a reputation among locals in the know for cheap and delicious seafood-based Thai nosh.

To find the restaurant, use the entrance near the ATM machines at Tha Chang.

RUB AROON Map p56 Thai \$

☎ 0 2622 2312; rub_ar_roon_cafe@yahoo.co.th; 310-312 Th Maharaj, Ko Ratanakosin; mains 60-95B; ☎ 8am-6pm; 🚗 air-con 508 & 512, ordinary 32 & 53, 🍷 Tha Tien
Perfectly situated for a post-temple refresher, this café across the street from Wat Pho also throws in great old-word atmosphere and a few simple dishes.

WANG LANG MARKET Map p56 Thai \$

Th Phra Chan & Trok Wang Lang, Thonburi; mains 20-60B; 🍷 Tha Wang Lang
Beside Siriraj Hospital is a busy market that sprawls west from Tha Wang Lang. Many of the vendors prepare fiery southern-style

curries and dishes such as *phàt phèt sataw* (spicy red curry stir-fry with stink beans). The theory is that southern Thai food took root here because of the nearby train station that served southern destinations.

BANGLAMPHU

Bangkok's most traditional district is not surprisingly one of the best places to try authentic central Thai-Bangkok-style nosh. Every alley wide enough to hold a wok is claimed as a makeshift dining room and, because of the backpacker presence, Western and vegetarian food is also plentiful and cheap.

CAFÉ PRIMAVERA Map pp68-9 Pizza \$\$

☎ 0 2281 4718; 56 Th Phra Sumen, Banglamphu; mains 95-325B; ☎ 9am-11pm; 🚗 ordinary 3, 6, 15 & 82, 🍷 Tha Phra Athit
If the coffee was just a tad better, this dark-wood and marble-topped table trattoria is just the kind of place we'd like to make our local café. The pizzas and homemade gelati offer more hope, and the friendly and efficient staff seal the deal.

JAY FAI Map pp68-9 Thai \$\$

☎ 0 2223 9384; 327 Th Mahachai, Banglamphu; mains 200-250B; ☎ 5pm-midnight Sun-Fri; 🚗 ordinary 5, 35 & 159, khlong taxi Tha Phan Fah
You wouldn't think so by looking at her bare-bones dining room, but Jay Fai is known far and wide for serving Bangkok's most expensive *phat khii mao* (drunkard's noodles). The price is justified by the copious fresh seafood, as well as Jay Fai's distinct frying style that results in a virtually oil-free finished product.

HEMLOCK Map pp68-9 Thai \$\$

☎ 0 2282 7507; hemlockeyes@hotmail.com; 56 Th Phra Athit, Banglamphu; mains 80-200B; ☎ 4pm-midnight; 🚗 ordinary 3, 6, 15 & 82, 🍷 Tha Phra Athit
Taking full advantage of its cosy shop-house location, this perennial favourite has enough style to feel like a special night out, but doesn't skimp on flavour or preparation. The eclectic menu reads like an ancient literary work, reviving old dishes from the aristocratic kitchens across the country. Try the flavourful *miang kham* (wild tea leaves wrapped around ginger, shallots, peanuts, lime and coconut flakes) or *yam khàmoi* (thieves' salad).

top picks

DINING WITH A VIEW

- **Emporium Food Hall** (p166) The cheapest view in town
- **Face** (p166) Thai teak, jungle and carp ponds complete the vista
- **Rang Mahal** (p169) A sea of concrete towers meets the horizon from this rooftop perch
- **River Bar** (p170) Sassy and classy glass box overlooking the Chao Phraya River
- **Deck** (opposite) The prime seat for sunset over Wat Arun

OH MY COD! Map pp68-9 English/Thai \$\$

☎ 0 2282 6553; www.fishandchipsbangkok.com; 95d, Soi Rambuttri Village Inn, Soi Rambuttri I, Banglamphu; mains 70-200B; ☎ 7.30am-11pm; 🚗 air-con 3, 32 & 49, ordinary 30, 32, 33 & 65, 🍷 Tha Phra Athit
English cuisine bears the burden of a negative reputation, but is there anything more satisfying than fish and chips? An order here takes the form of a puffy filet accompanied by thick-cut chips (French fries) and peas, prepared 'garden' or 'mushy' style. Breakfast is served all day, and parched Anglophiles can enjoy a proper cuppa in the sunny courtyard dining area.

SHOSHANA Map pp68-9 Israeli \$

☎ 0 2282 9948; 88 Th Chakraphong, Banglamphu; mains 90-150B; ☎ 11am-11pm; 🚗 air-con 3, 32 & 49, ordinary 30, 32, 33 & 65, 🍷 Tha Phra Athit
One of Khao San's longest-running Israeli restaurants, Shoshana resembles your grandparents' living room down to the tacky paintings and perpetual re-runs of 'Seinfeld'. The 'I heart Shoshana' T-shirts worn by the wait staff may be a hopelessly optimistic description of employee morale, but the gut-filling chips-falafel-and-hummus plates leave nothing to be desired.

CHOTE CHITR Map pp68-9 Thai \$

☎ 0 2221 4082; 146 Th Phraeng Phuton, Banglamphu; mains 60-150B; ☎ 11am-10pm; 🚗 air-con 508, ordinary 5, 35 & 56, khlong taxi Tha Phan Fah
If you can ignore the occasional dog napping on the tables, a meal at this local legend will undoubtedly change your opinions about cuisine. Chote Chitr (which

is pronounced *chôht jít*) puts out delicious, dictionary-definition central Thai fare, and is particularly renowned for its *mii kràwp*, sweet-and-spicy crispy fried noodles, still made the old-school way. But just about anything from the exceedingly extensive menu will impress.

RANEE'S GUESTHOUSE

Map pp68-9 Thai Vegetarian \$
☎ 0 2282 4072; 77 Trok Mayom off Th Tanao, Banglamphu; mains 70-120B; ☎ 7am-midnight; ☎ air-con 511 & 512, ordinary 15, 30 & 65, 🏠 Tha Phra Athit

In addition to meat-free Thai, this 'flash-packer' oasis now fancies itself as a bakery, and puts out some better-than-decent pizza, pasta and bread. Dining with new friends in the cool leafy courtyard, we double-dare you to miss the bad old days of cheap guesthouse eats.

KRUA NOPPHARAT Map pp68-9 Thai \$

☎ 0 2281 7578; 130-132 Th Phra Athit, Banglamphu; mains 60-100B; ☎ 10.30am-2.30pm & 5-9pm Mon-Sat; ☎ ordinary 3, 6, 15 & 82, 🏠 Tha Phra Athit

A few dusty paintings are the only effort at interior design at this family-run standby. Where flavour is concerned, however, Krua Noppharat is willing to expend considerably more energy. Krua Noppharat is as popular among foreigners as it is among Thais, but thankfully does not tone down its excellent central and southern-style Thai fare for the former.

KAIYANG BORAN Map pp68-9 Thai \$

☎ 0 2622 2349; 474-476 Th Tanao, Banglamphu; mains 40-100B; ☎ 10am-10pm; ☎ air-con 508, ordinary 5, 35 & 56, khlong taxi Tha Phan Fah
In a neighbourhood filled with old-school Bangkok-style grub, Kaiyang Boran's unabashedly Isan menu stands out. It is even more incongruous considering that the owner is Thai-Chinese and had never eaten the fiery dishes of the northeast until he met his wife from Chaiyapoom. The comfortable setting and air-conditioning make this an ideal spot for overheated neat freaks made nervous by streetside dining.

BAAN PHRA ARTHIT Map pp68-9 Café \$

☎ 0 2280 7878; baanphraarthit@hotmail.com; 102/1 Th Phra Athit, Banglamphu; mains 50-90B;

☎ 7am-8pm; ☎ ordinary 3, 6, 15 & 82, 🏠 Tha Phra Athit

When only air-conditioning will do, why not do it in style? This classy café features a few basic Western-Thai fusion dishes, decent coffee, and even better cakes and sweets. And all of this for less than the price of a latté back at home.

PAN Map pp68-9 Thai \$

☎ 0 83817 4227; Th Rambutri, Banglamphu; mains 50-90B; ☎ 11.30am-10pm; ☎ air-con 3, 32 & 49, ordinary 30, 32, 33 & 65, 🏠 Tha Phra Athit
If you're looking for authentic Thai, but don't want to stray far from the comforts of Th Khao San, this streetside eatery (next to Viengtai Hotel) is your best bet. Simply look for the overflowing tray of raw ingredients, point to what you want and Pan will mix it up for you. The clientele is decidedly international, but the flavours wholly domestic.

ROTI-MATABA Map pp68-9 Thai-Muslim \$

☎ 0 2282 2119; 136 Th Phra Athit, Banglamphu; mains 50-90B; ☎ 7am-10pm Tue-Sun; ☎ ordinary 3, 6, 15 & 82, 🏠 Tha Phra Athit

This classic eatery appears to have become a bit too big for its britches in recent years, but still serves tasty Thai-Muslim dishes such as roti, *kaeng mátsàman* (Muslim curry), a brilliantly sour fish curry, and *mátàbà* (a sort of stuffed Indian pancake). An upstairs air-con dining area and outdoor tables provide barely enough seating for its loyal fans.

THIP SAMAI Map pp68-9 Thai \$

☎ 0 2221 6280; www.thipsamai.com; 313 Th Mahachai, Banglamphu; mains 25-120B; ☎ 5.30pm-1.30am; ☎ ordinary 5, 35 & 159, khlong taxi Tha Phan Fah

Brace yourself, but you should be aware that the fried noodles sold from carts along Th Khao San have nothing to do with the dish known as *phàt thai*. Luckily, less than a five-minute tük-tük drive away lies Thip Samai, also known by locals as *phàt thai pratuu phii*, and home to the most legendary *phàt thai* in town. For something a bit different, try the delicate egg-wrapped version, or the *phàt thai* fried with *man kung*, decadent shrimp fat.

KIM LENG Map pp68-9 Thai \$

☎ 0 2622 2062; 158-160 Th Tanao, Banglamphu; mains 40-80B; ☎ 10am-10pm Mon-Sat; ☎ air-con 508, ordinary 5, 35 & 56, khlong taxi Tha Phan Fah

A WILD CAKE HUNT

Few Westerners, even those who've lived here for decades, seem to take to the hyper-sweet technicolour world of *kháwng wáan* and *khànmóm* (traditional Thai sweets and desserts). Luckily, in recent years Bangkok has seen an abundance of high-quality, domestically made Western-style cakes, ice creams and chocolates.

The best place to begin your search for the sweet is undoubtedly the basement of **Siam Paragon** (p135). Within this expansive temple to indulgence, cake lovers will be delighted to find branches of the Oriental Hotel Shop, Café le Nôtre and Vanilla Brasserie. Stop by Le Gourmet for chocolate orbs of pleasure, and Gelaté, a gelato stall located in the supermarket, makes excellent Italian-style ice cream served in freshly made waffle cones.

If the thought of dining in a mall gives you hives, take a seat at the marble-topped tables of **La Boulange** (Map pp108-9; ☎ 0 2631 0354; www.la-boulange.com; 2-2/1 Th Convent, Silom). This longstanding French-owned bakery makes a huge variety of admirable cakes and Viennoiserie.

Duc de Praslin (Map pp118-19; ☎ 0 2258 3200; www.gallothai.com; ground fl, Fenix Tower, Soi 31, Th Sukhumvit), a Belgian-owned chocolatier, has opened several of its classy European cafés at various locations around town. As well as the spot-on bon-bons, try a hot cocoa, made in front of your eyes by steaming milk with shards of rich chocolate. About 2km up the road at Visage, part of **Face** (p166), Eric Perez prepares many of the same near-perfect pastries and chocolates he made at the French Embassy and the Ritz in Washington DC.

Nowadays even the Thais need their tiramisù and tartes, and respectable Western-style desserts can be found along Th Phra Athit in Banglamphu. Anshada of **Ann's Sweet** (Map pp68-9; ☎ 0 86889 1383; 138 Th Phra Athit, Banglamphu) makes some pretty fly cakes for a Thai girl, and the decadent desserts at **Baan Phra Arthit** (opposite) and **It's Happened to be a Closet** (p130) leave little to be desired.

Want a home-cooked meal, but having trouble convincing random strangers on the street to make one for you? A visit to this eatery excelling in the foods of central Thailand is a decent substitute. As with much of the food of the capital, sweet intermingles with spicy here, and you can't go wrong with Kim Leng's *hàw mòk* (steamed curry) or *ndam phrik kà-pi* (shrimp paste dip served as a set with veggies and deep-fried fish).

MAY KAIDEE Map pp68-9 Thai Vegetarian \$

☎ 0 2281 7699; www.maykadee.com; sub-soi off Th Tanao, Banglamphu; mains 50B; ☎ 11am-9.30pm; ☎ air-con 511 & 512, ordinary 15, 30 & 65, 🏠 Tha Phra Athit

May Kaidee started doing non-meat around the same time that fisherman pants became the backpacker uniform. She knows her audience: easy on chillies, heavy on coconut milk. And she doesn't even wince when new arrivals ask for chopsticks for their curries.

To find this restaurant from Th Khao San, cross Th Tanao and follow the little *soi* near Sirinthip Guesthouse; take the first left for 50m. There is a second branch just over the bridge on Th Samsen that also offers cooking lessons (see p158).

ARROI Map pp68-9 Thai Vegetarian \$

152 Th Din So, Banglamphu; mains 20-30B; ☎ 7am-8pm; ☎ air-con 508, ordinary 5, 35, 56 & 159, khlong taxi Tha Phan Fah

Employing a variety of tasty meat substitutes and sticking to a repertoire of classic Thai dishes, this tiny restaurant will even make flesh-eaters happy.

THEWET & DUSIT

The primary draw to this sleepy neighbourhood is the riverside restaurants that drink in the cool river breezes and grill whole fish for communal picking.

IN LOVE Map p79 Thai \$\$

☎ 0 2281 2900; Th Krung Kasem, Thewet; mains 150-200B; ☎ 11am-10pm; ☎ air-con 506 & 53, 🏠 Tha Thewet

This recently remodelled perch straddling the Chao Phraya River has undergone a transformation from homey to chic, reflecting much of the change in today's newfangled Bangkok. Slate grey and minimalist décor now define your settings, but the seafood-heavy menu, thankfully, still has its head in the past.

KALOANG HOME KITCHEN

Map p79 Thai \$
☎ 0 2281 9228; 2 Th Si Ayuthaya, Thewet; mains 80-200B; ☎ 11am-11pm; ☎ 9am-6pm; ☎ air-con 3, 16, 32, 49, 505, ordinary 30, 32, 33, 64 & 65, 🏠 Tha Thewet

Don't be alarmed by the peeling paint and the dilapidated deck; Kaloang Home

NOW YOU'RE COOKING

Having consumed everything Bangkok has to offer is one thing, but imagine the points you'll rack up if you can make the same dishes for your friends back at home. A visit to a Thai cooking school has become a must-do for many Bangkok itineraries, and for some visitors it is a highlight of their trip.

Courses range in price and value: a typical half-day course should include at least a basic introduction to Thai ingredients and flavours, and a hands-on chance to both prepare and cook several dishes. Most schools offer a revolving cast of dishes that changes on a daily basis, making it possible to study for a week without repeating a dish, if desired. Many courses include a visit to a market, and nearly all lessons include a set of printed recipes and end with a communal lunch consisting of your handiwork. At the more expensive schools, students are also usually given an apron and a gift box of Thai cooking ingredients.

Baipai Thai Cooking School (Map pp124–5; ☎ 0 2294 9029; www.baipai.com; 150/12 Soi Naksuwan, Th Nonsee, Greater Bangkok; lessons 1800B) Housed in an attractive suburban villa, and taught by a small army of staff, Baipai offers two daily lessons (9.30am to 1.30pm and 1.30pm to 5.30pm Tuesday to Sunday) of four dishes each. Transport is available.

Blue Elephant Cooking School (Map pp108–9; ☎ 0 2673 9353; www.blueelephant.com; 233 Th Sathon Tai, Silom; lessons 2800B) Bangkok's most chi-chi Thai cooking school offers two lessons a day (8.45am to 12.30pm and 1.15pm to 5pm) Monday to Saturday. The morning class squeezes in a visit to a local market, while the afternoon session includes a detailed introduction to Thai ingredients.

Epicurean Kitchen Thai Cooking School (Map pp108–9; ☎ 0 2631 1119; www.thaikitchen.com; 10/2 Th Convent, Th Silom; lessons 2000B) This cramped but classy school offers daily lessons (9.30am to 1pm Monday to Friday) that encompass a whopping eight dishes, as well as a one-hour 'short course' of four dishes.

May Kaidee's Vegetarian Thai Cooking School (Map pp68–9; ☎ 0 2281 7699; www.maykaidee.com; 33 Th Sam-sen, Banglamphu; lessons 1200B) One of the few places around offering a truly meat-free cooking experience, May's classes (9am to 1pm) offer a brief visit to a local market and instruction in 10 veggie versions of traditional Thai dishes.

Oriental Hotel Thai Cooking School (Map pp108–9; ☎ 0 2659 9000; www.mandarinoriental.com; 48 Soi 38, Th Charoen Krung, Riverside; lessons 4500B) Located across the river in an antique wooden home, the Oriental's cooking class features a daily revolving menu of four dishes. The lessons (9am to 12.30pm Monday to Saturday) are less 'hands on' than elsewhere, and cooking is done in teams, rather than individually.

Silom Thai Cooking School (Map pp108–9; ☎ 0 84726 5669; www.bangkokthaicooking.com; 68 Soi 13, Th Silom; lessons 1000B) Although the facilities are basic, Silom crams a visit to a local market and instruction of six dishes into 3½ hours (9.30am to 1pm), making it the best bang for your baht. Transport available.

Kitchen certainly isn't. The laid-back atmosphere and seafood-heavy menu will quickly dispel any concerns about sinking into the Chao Phraya, and a beer and the breeze will temporarily erase any scarring memories of Bangkok traffic.

Finding this restaurant is part of the fun: follow Th Si Ayuthaya toward the river and turn right at the temple past the kids playing badminton till the end of the street.

CHINATOWN

Although Chinatown seems to be dominated by restaurants serving shark-fin and bird's nest soup, noodles usually prepared by the street vendors that line Th Yaowarat after dark are the true Chinatown meal. During the annual **Vegetarian Festival** (opposite), the neighbourhood embraces meatless meals with yellow-flagged street stalls.

Phahurat, Bangkok's Little India, has several inconspicuous Indian restaurants and an afternoon samosa vendor near Soi ATM.

SHANGARILA RESTAURANT

Map p84 Chinese \$\$\$

☎ 0 2224 5933; 306 Th Yaowarat, Chinatown; mains 220-500B; ☎ 11am-10pm; ☎ air-con 4, 49, 73 & 507, ordinary 40, 49, 73, 85 & 159, 🍷 Tha Ratchawong

This massive, banquet-style restaurant prepares a variety of banquet-sized Cantonese dishes for ravenous families. The dim sum lunches are worth the effort of muscling your way past the outdoor steam tables.

TANG JAI YUU

Map p84 Chinese \$\$\$
☎ 0 2224 2167; 85-89 Th Yaowaphanit, Chinatown; mains 220-500B; ☎ 11am-10pm; ☎ air-con 4, 49, 73 & 507, ordinary 40, 49, 73, 85 & 159, 🍷 Tha Ratchawong

In Thailand, policemen and big-haired women are usually a tip-off for good eats, not suspicious activity, and Tang Jai Yuu is no exception. This place specialises in Teo Chew and Chinese-Thai specialities with an emphasis on seafood, and you can't go wrong choosing a fresh fish from the tank out the front and letting the boys grill it for you.

CHIANG KII

Map p84 Thai-Chinese \$\$

54 Soi Bamrungrat, Chinatown; mains 250B; ☎ 5pm-10pm; ☎ air-con 4, 49, 73 & 507, ordinary 40, 49, 73, 85 & 159, 🍷 Tha Ratchawong
At 250B, Chiang Kii's *khào tôm pla* (rice soup with fish) is among the most expensive in town. Before balking at the price, witness the care that the elderly Thai-Chinese owners put into every bowl, not to mention the generous amount of exceedingly fresh fish, and it begins to make sense.

HUA SENG HONG

Map p84 Thai-Chinese \$\$

☎ 0 2222 0635; 371-373 Th Yaowarat, Chinatown; mains 100-300B; ☎ 10am-midnight; ☎ air-con 4, 49, 73 & 507, ordinary 40, 49, 73, 85 & 159, 🍷 Tha Ratchawong
Shark-fin soup may draw heaps of Asian tourists into this place, but Hua Seng Hong's varied menu, including dim sum, braised goose feet and noodles, make it a delicious destination for anybody craving Chinese.

ROYAL INDIA

Map p84 Indian \$\$

☎ 0 2221 6565; 392/1 Th Chakraphet, Phahurat; mains 100-250B; ☎ 10am-10pm; ☎ air-con 73, ordinary 8, 🍷 Tha Saphan Phut
A windowless dining room of 10 tables in a creepy alley may not be everybody's ideal lunch destination, but this legendary north

WAVING THE YELLOW FLAG

During the annual Vegetarian Festival (in September/October), Bangkok's Chinatown becomes a virtual orgy of non-meat cuisine. The festivities centre on Wat Mangkon Kamalawat, on Th Charoen Krung, and in the Talaat Noi area, but food shops and stalls all over the city post yellow flags to announce their meat-free status.

Celebrating alongside the ethnic Chinese are Thais who look forward to the special dishes that appear during the festival period. Most restaurants will put their normal menus on hold and instead prepare soy-based substitutes for standard Thai dishes like *tôm yam*, *kaeng mât-sâm-an*, and *kaeng khiaw wân*. Even Thai regional cuisines are sold – without the meat, of course. Of the special festival dishes, yellow Hokkien-style noodles appear in stir-fried dishes along with meaty mushrooms and big hunks of vegetables.

Along with abstinence from meat, the 10-day festival is celebrated with special visits to the temple, often requiring worshippers to dress in white.

Indian place continues to draw foodies despite the lack of aesthetics. Try any of the delicious breads or saucy curries, and finish with a homemade Punjabi sweet.

OLD SIAM PLAZA Map p84 Thai \$
cnr Th Phahurat & Th Triphet, Phahurat; mains 30-90B; ☎ 10am-5pm; ☎ air-con 73, ordinary 8, 🍷 Tha Saphan Phut

Wedged between the western edge of Chinatown and the northern edge of Phahurat, this shopping plaza has a decent 3rd-floor food centre serving Thai and Chinese food. Even better yet, the 1st floor is a virtual crash course in Thai desserts, with vendors selling all the streetside sweets in a quieter and more sanitary setting.

HONG KONG NOODLES

Map p84 Chinese \$

136 Trok Itsaranuphap, Th Charoen Krung, Chinatown; mains 30B; ☎ 9am-6pm; ☎ air-con 4, 49, 73 & 507, ordinary 40, 49, 73, 85 & 159, 🍷 Tha Ratchawong

Deep in the heart of the vendor-lined *soi* known as Talaat Mai (New Market), this claustrophobic shop does a busy trade in steaming bowls of wheat-and-egg noodles. If you can find a seat, there's a nice vista of the surrounding commerce.

THAI CHAROEN

Map p84 Thai-Chinese \$

☎ 0 2221 2633; 454 Th Charoen Krung, Chinatown; mains 20-30B; ☎ 9am-7pm; ☎ air-con 4, 49, 73 & 507, ordinary 40, 49, 73, 85 & 159, 🍷 Tha Ratchawong

Simply look for the table of delicious-looking eats out front. This unassuming restaurant specialises in cheap and delicious Thai-Chinese specialities such as stuffed-squid, stir-fried eggplant, and *jàp chái* (a Chinese vegetable 'stew').

BANGKOK'S LITTLE ITALY

Italian is the most prevalent foreign cuisine in Bangkok, and the city's greatest concentration of Italian restaurants can be found between the leafy streets of Th Lang Suan and Soi Tonson. Although the majority of the kitchens reach for the upper echelon of the dining market, there is a decent mix of the quirky and the exclusive to slake your pasta craving.

Air Plane (Map pp98-9; ☎ 0 2252 4630; airplanerest@hotmail.com; 63 Soi Lang Suan, Ploenchit; mains 90-250B; 🕒 11am-2.30pm & 6-11pm) Located in a refurbished home, the starched tablecloths and varied menu make this a step up from the average corner spaghetti shack.

Calderazzo (Map pp98-9; ☎ 0 2252 8108; 59 Soi Lang Suan, Ploenchit; mains 200-800B; 🕒 11am-2.30pm & 6-11pm) Specialising in southern Italian cuisine, the chic dining room and imported furniture leave no doubt that this is the poshest of the area's Italian immigrants. Located just across the street is the slightly more casual Calderazzo Bistro.

Gianni Ristorante (Map pp98-9; ☎ 0 2252 1619; www.giannibkk.com; 34/1 Soi Tonson, Ploenchit; mains 260-600B; 🕒 11am-2pm & 6-11pm) Generally considered the best of the lot, this restaurant nearly singlehandedly upped the bracket for Italian dining in Bangkok. Homemade sausages, lobster-stuffed raviolis and braised lamb shank transport tasterbuds to the Adriatic. Wine lovers rave about the huge and unique selection.

No. 43 (Map pp98-9; ☎ 0 2658 7444; Cape House, 43 Soi Lang Suan, Th Ploenchit; 🕒 11am-11pm) If you prefer quantity over quality, this chain-like restaurant offers an acceptable Italian lunch buffet for 300B.

Paesano (Map pp98-9; ☎ 0 2252 2834; 96/7 Soi Tonson, Ploenchit; mains 150-550B; 🕒 11am-2pm & 5.30-10.30pm) This Bangkok institution combines old-school atmosphere with an even older-school menu.

Pan Pan (Map pp98-9; ☎ 0 2252 7104; 45 Soi Lang Suan, Ploenchit; mains 80-220B; 🕒 11am-11pm) Open since 1976, this is undoubtedly where many Bangkok Thais got their first taste of Italy. Local office workers still comprise the majority of the clientele at what is probably the cheapest of the area's Italian joints.

SIAM SQUARE, PRATUNAM & PLOENCHIT

Welcome to Mall Land. Although the plastic façades of famous franchises seem to prevail, there are some noteworthy independent eats, both with and without amenities such as air-conditioning and shopping families. Soi Lang Suan is a virtual Little Italy of Italian restaurants, and the area around Th Withayu is home to a few longstanding Thai restaurants.

CRYSTAL JADE LA MIAN XIAO LONG BAO

Map pp98-9 Chinese \$\$
☎ 0 2250 7990; Urban Kitchen, Basement Erawan Bangkok, 494 Th Ploenchit; mains 120-300B; 🕒 10am-10pm; 🍷 Chitlom

The tongue-twistingly long name of this excellent Singaporean chain refers to the restaurant's signature wheat noodles (*la mian*) and the famous Shanghainese steamed dumplings (*xiao long bao*). If you order the hand-pulled noodles (which you should do) allow the staff to cut them with kitchen shears, otherwise you'll end up with ample evidence of your meal on your shirt.

KUAYTIAW REUA THA SIAM

Map pp98-9 Thai \$
☎ 0 2252 8353; Soi 3, Siam Sq, Th Phra Ram 1; mains 40-100B; 🕒 9am-9pm; 🍷 Siam

Back in the days when canals were the city's thoroughfares, the noodle boat floated from house to house. Now that life has moved to solid ground, this restaurant and others like it pay tribute to those days by serving bowls from decidedly land-locked vessels. The restaurant's namesake, *kuaytiaw reua* (boat noodles) are, like the chain's surprisingly decent Isan food, intensely spicy and satisfying.

SANGUAN SRI

Map pp98-9 Thai \$
☎ 0 2252 7637; 59/1 Th Withayu, Ploenchit; mains 60-150B; 🕒 10am-3pm Mon-Sat; 🍷 Ploenchit
This restaurant, resembling a concrete bunker filled with furniture circa 1973, can afford to remain decidedly *choei* (old-fashioned) simply because of its reputation. Mimic the area's hungry office staff and try the excellent *kaeng phèt pèt yàng*, red curry with grilled duck breast served over snowy white *khànm jèen* noodles.

RIVERSIDE, SILOM & LUMPHINI

Riverside Bangkok is often associated with hotel fine dining, but this is actually one of the city's most diverse eating districts. Those willing to try something different can poke into one of the numerous Thai-Muslim or In-

BIG DEAL

Although the prices at Bangkok's best restaurants may seem like chump change when compared to those of their brethren in New York City or London, a few nights of eating out at this level is going to make a dent in just about anyone's wallet. To ease the pain but still savour the flavour, we suggest dining at lunch, when many of Bangkok's most revered upmarket eateries offer some fantastic set-lunch specials.

The three-course set lunch at **Gianni Ristorante** (opposite) for a mere 350B++ is a downright steal, and three set courses at **Cy'an** (below) for 680B++ also had us wondering if there was some sort of catch. Other standouts include a fun three-tapas lunch set at **Tapas Café** (p168) for 280B++, the three-course lunch for 1000B++ at the Dusit Thani's elegant French restaurant **D'Sens** (below), and for 1050B++, a three-course lunch at what is the city's poshest eatery, the Oriental Hotel's **Le Normandie** (below).

dian restaurants near the intersection with Th Charoen Krung. Authentic foreign food can be found at the eastern end of Th Silom, near BTS Sala Daeng, and several old-school eating houses can be found at the river end. And if you're set on decadent dining, but can't justify the price tag, consider lunch, when many of Bangkok's most famous hotel restaurants offer cut-rate specials to entice diners.

CY'AN & GLOW

Map p112 International \$\$\$
☎ 0 2625 3333; www.metropolitan.com.bz; Metropolitan Hotel, 27 Th Sathon Tai, Silom; 7-course meal 2800B; 🕒 6am-10.30am, noon-2pm & 6.30-10.30pm; 🍷 Lumphini

Resembling the school cafeteria that Philippe Starck never designed, Cy'an is the perfect forum for the mix-and-match creations of Australian chef Daniel Moran, a protégé of Neil Perry. Combining vibrant Mediterranean and Moroccan flavours, a healthy obsession with the finest seafood, and a chic yet intimate atmosphere, the result is quite possibly the most faultless fine-dining experience in town.

The hotel's 'fresh food' restaurant, Glow has a sanatorium effect with health-conscious spa food to offset the ill effects of guzzling Bangkok's toxic sludge.

LE NORMANDIE

Map pp108-9 French \$\$\$
☎ 0 2236 0400; Oriental Hotel, Soi 38, Th Charoen Krung, Riverside; 3/7 course meals 1000/4000B; 🕒 noon-2.30pm & 7pm-10.30pm, closed lunch Sun; 🍷 ordinary 35, 36, 75 & 93, 🍷 Tha Oriental
For decades Le Normandie was synonymous with fine dining in the city. And although today's Bangkok boasts a plethora of upmarket choices, Le Normandie has maintained its niche, and is still the only place to go for a genuinely old-world 'continental' dining experience. A revolving cast

of Michelin-starred guest chefs and some of the world's most decadent ingredients keep up the standard, and appropriately formal attire (including jackets) is required.

BLUE ELEPHANT

Map pp108-9 Thai \$\$\$
☎ 0 2673 9353; www.blueelephant.com; 233 Th Sathon Tai, Silom; mains 200-500B; 🕒 11.30am-2.30pm & 6.30-10.30pm; 🍷 Surasak
The Blue Elephant got its start in Brussels more than two decades ago as an exotic outpost of royal Thai cuisine. After spreading to other cities, the owners boldly chose Bangkok, the cuisine's birth mother, as its ninth location. Set in a stunning Sino-Portuguese colonial building with service fit for royalty, the restaurant also features an impressive cooking school (see p158).

D'SENS

Map pp108-9 French \$\$\$
☎ 0 2200 9000; www.dusit.com; 22nd fl, Dusit Thani Hotel, 946 Th Rama IV, Silom; mains 130-500B; 🕒 11.30am-2pm Mon-Fri & 6-10pm Mon-Sat; 🍷 Sala Daeng, 🍷 Lumphini
Located in what looks like a control tower at the top of the Dusit Thani Hotel. Bangkok's swankiest diners come to D'Sens for vibrant contemporary French cuisine as designated by the Michelin star-lauded brothers, Jacques and Laurent Pourcel. Gracious service and one of the best views of Bangkok round out the package.

EAT ME RESTAURANT

Map pp108-9 International \$\$\$
☎ 0 2238 0931; Soi Phiphat 2, off Th Convent, Silom; mains 200-400B; 🕒 3pm-1am; 🍷 Sala Daeng, 🍷 Silom
A little bit of Sydney has blossomed here off Th Silom, helping to give Bangkok more cosmo cred. Chic, minimalist décor is accessorised by rotating art exhibits supplied by H Gallery, the city's leading contemporary

gallery. And lest we forget, the food is creative and modern, spanning the globe from pumpkin risotto to tuna tartare.

LE BOUCHON Map pp108–9 French \$\$\$

☎ 0 2234 9109; Soi Patpong 2, Silom; mains 150-350B; ☎ noon-3pm & 6pm-midnight; 🍷 Sala Daeng, 🍷 Lumphini

Cast aside any preconceived notions of pretentious waiters and intimidating menus; this homely bistro smack-dab in the middle of one of Bangkok's more 'colourful' districts is a capable and fun introduction to French cooking. Choose your dishes from the blackboard menu toted around by the cheery waiting staff, but it'd be a shame to miss the garlicky frogs' legs or the savoury foie gras pâté.

INDIAN HUT Map pp108–9 Indian \$\$

☎ 0 2635 7876; www.indian-hut.com; 311/2-5 Th Surawong, Silom; mains 130-250B; ☎ 11am-10.30pm; 🍷 ordinary 35, 36, 75 & 93, 🍷 Tha Oriental

This Indian restaurant, across from the Manorha Hotel, specialises in Nawabi (Lucknow) cuisine. Try the vegetarian samosas, fresh prawns cooked with ginger or the homemade paneer in tomato and onion curry.

BAN CHIANG Map pp108–9 Thai \$\$

☎ 0 2236 7045, 14 Soi Si Wiang, Th Surasak, Silom; mains 90-150B; ☎ 11.30am-2pm & 5.30-10.30pm; 🍷 Surasak

Named after the archaeological site in northeastern Thailand, Ban Chiang is a

tourist spot that deserves referrals. Traditional Thai and Isan cuisine fills the menu in a cosy wooden house with eclectic décor.

MIZU'S KITCHEN

Map pp108–9 Japanese/Steak \$\$

☎ 0 2233 6447; 32 Soi Patpong 1, Th Silom; mains 90-400B; ☎ noon-1am; 🍷 Sala Daeng, Metro Silom

This certifiable hole-in-the-wall oozes character, not to mention the beefy essence of thousands of steaks served over the decades. Do order the house Sarika steak, and do take a hint from the regulars and use your chequered tablecloth to protect your clothes from the spray of the hot plate when it arrives.

SCOOZI Map pp108–9 Italian \$\$

☎ 0 2234 6999; www.scoozipizza.com; 174 Th Surawong, Silom; mains 150-350B; ☎ 10.30am-11pm; 🍷 Chong Nonsi

At this chic pizzeria you can witness your pie being skilfully tossed and topped before it's blistered in a wood-burning oven from Italy. Go minimalist for once and order the tasty napoletana, a pizza topped with little more than mozzarella, anchovies and olives. The ever-expanding Scoozie empire now boasts branches at **Thanon Khao San** (Map pp68–9; ☎ 0 2280 5280; 201 Soi Sunset) and **Thonglor** (Map pp118–19; ☎ 0 2391 5113; Fenix Thonglor, Soi 1, Soi 55 (Thonglor), Th Sukhumvit).

SOMBOON SEAFOOD Map pp108–9 Thai \$\$

☎ 0 2233 3104; www.somboonseafood.com; cnr Th Surawong & Th Narathiwat Ratchanakharin, Silom; mains 150-250B; ☎ 4pm-midnight; 🍷 Chong Nonsi

Somboon, a classy seafood hall with a reputation far and wide, is known for doing the best curry-powder crab in town. Soy-steamed sea bass (*plaa kràphong nêung sii-iiw*) is also a speciality and, like all good Thai seafood, should be enjoyed with an immense platter of *khào phât puu* (fried rice with crab) and as many friends as you can gather together.

CHENNAI KITCHEN

Map pp108–9 Indian Vegetarian \$

☎ 0 2234 1266; 10 Thanon Pan, Th Silom; mains 50-120B; ☎ 10am-3pm; 🍷 air-con 504, 514, 544 & 547, ordinary 15, 76, 115, 162, 163 & 164, 🍷 Surasak

This thimble-sized restaurant near the Hindu temple puts out some of the most

solid southern Indian vegetarian around. Yard-long *dosai* (a crispy southern Indian bread) is always a good choice, but if you're feeling indecisive (and/or exceptionally famished) go for the banana-leaf thali that seems to incorporate just about everything in the kitchen.

CIRCLE OF FRIENDS Map pp108–9 Thai \$

☎ 0 2237 0080; Soi 10, Th Sathorn, Silom; mains 60-100B; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Fri, 4pm-8pm Sat & Sun; 🍷 Surasak

Somehow remaining cool and shady on even the hottest days, this leafy café shares space with the adjacent Saeng-Arom Ashram. With each day of the week comes two attractive set-menu options, and refreshing herbal and fruit drinks abound.

FOO MUI KEE Map pp108–9 Thai/Chinese \$

☎ 0 2234 6648; 10-12 Soi 22 (Prachoom), Silom; mains 20-50B; ☎ 10am-9pm; 🍷 air-con 504, 514, 544 & 547, ordinary 15, 76, 115, 162, 163 & 164, 🍷 Chong Nonsi

Foo Mui Kee has been serving a unique mixture of Thai, Chinese and European dishes for nearly 80 years. In some cases, such as the stewed ox tongue served with rice, the boundaries between cuisines are not so distinct, although the bottle of Worcestershire sauce on each table is a giveaway of the restaurant's Western leanings.

HARMONIQUE Map pp108–9 Thai \$

☎ 0 2237 8175; Soi 34, Th Charoen Krung, Silom; mains 60-150B; ☎ 11am-10pm Mon-Sat; 🍷 ordinary 35, 36, 75 & 93, 🍷 Tha Oriental

A tiny oasis squeezed into a former Chinese residence, Harmonique is an expat staple for thrifty romantic dinners. The dishes are unabashedly designed for folks fearful of chillies and fish sauce, but the ambience of fairy lights, a central banyan tree and marble-topped tables have spared Harmonique from our chopping block.

HOME CUISINE ISLAMIC RESTAURANT Map pp108–9 Thai-Muslim \$

☎ 0 2234 7911; 196-198 Soi 36, Th Charoen Krung, Riverside; mains 45-130B; ☎ 11am-10pm Mon-Sat, 6-10pm Sun; 🍷 Tha Oriental

Hidden in a leafy corner mercifully distant from hectic Th Charoen Krung, this bungalow-like restaurant does tasty Thai-Muslim with an endearing Indian accent. Sit out on the breezy patio and try the simultaneously

rich and sour fish curry, accompanied ideally by a flaky roti or three.

JAY SO Map pp108–9 Thai \$

☎ 0 85999 4225; 146/1 Soi Phiphat 2, Th Silom; mains 20-50B; ☎ 10am-5.30pm; 🍷 Sala Daeng, 🍷 Lumphini

This bright blue crumbling shack is living proof that, where authentic Thai food is concerned, ambience is often considered more a liability than an asset. Fittingly, Jay So has no menu as such, but a mortar and pestle and a huge grill are the telltale signs of ballistically spicy *sôm-tam*, sublime herb-stuffed grilled catfish and other Isan specialties.

KAI THAWT JAY KII (SOI POLO FRIED CHICKEN) Map p112 Thai \$

☎ 0 1252 2252; 137/1-3 Soi Polo, Th Withayu, Lumphini; mains 30-150B; ☎ 7am-10pm; 🍷 Ploenchit, 🍷 Lumphini

This Cinderella of a former street stall has become virtually synonymous with fried chicken. Although the *sôm-tam*, sticky rice and *lâap* (spicy 'salad' of minced meat) give the impression of an Isan eatery, the restaurant's namesake deep-fried bird is more southern in origin. Regardless, smothered in a thick layer of crispy deep-fried garlic, it is none other than a truly Bangkok experience.

KHRUA AROY AROY Map pp108–9 Thai \$

☎ 0 2635 2365; Th Pan, Th Silom; mains 30-70B; ☎ 6am-6pm; 🍷 air-con 504, 514, 544 & 547, ordinary 15, 76, 115, 162, 163 & 164, 🍷 Surasak

Despite being the kind of family-run Thai restaurant where nobody seems to mind a cat slumbering on the cash register, Khrua Aroy Aroy ('Delicious Delicious Kitchen') lives up to its lofty name. Stop by for some of the richest curries around, as well as the interesting daily specials including, on Thursdays, *khào khlúk kà-pi*: rice cooked in shrimp paste and served with sweet pork, shredded green mango and other toppings.

MASHOOR Map pp108–9 Indian Vegetarian \$

☎ 0 2234 9305; 38 Th Pan, Th Silom; mains 50-120B; ☎ 9am-9pm; 🍷 air-con 504, 514, 544 & 547, ordinary 15, 76, 115, 162, 163 & 164, 🍷 Surasak

Indian-Nepali vegetarian cuisine via Myanmar may sound like an entirely new cuisine altogether, but somehow it tastes

top picks

OLD-SKOOL BANGKOK DINING

- **Chote Chitr** (p155) The flavours of Olde Bangkok served up in an antique shophouse
- **Foo Mui Kee** (opposite) Where else can you have your ox tongue stew and eat it in an 80-year-old restaurant too?
- **Mizu's Kitchen** (right) Travel back in time to the R&R days of the 'American' War
- **Muslim Restaurant** (p164) Pull up a booth and enjoy dishes that haven't changed in nearly a century
- **Sanguan Sri** (p160) Party like it's 1969; fortunately the food is that of the timeless variety

DINNER CRUISES

The Chao Phraya River is lovely in the evenings, with the skyscrapers' lights twinkling in the distance and a cool breeze chasing the heat away. A dozen or more companies run regular dinner cruises along the river. Some are mammoth boats so brightly lit inside that you'd never know you were on the water; others are more sedate and intimate, allowing patrons to see the surroundings. Several of the dinner boats cruise under the well-lit Saphan Phra Ram IX, the longest single-span cable-suspension bridge in the world.

Loy Nava (Map pp108–9; ☎ 0 2437 4932; www.loynava.com; set menu 1618B) Two cruises (from 6pm to 8pm and 8pm to 10pm) travel from Tha Si Phraya aboard a converted rice barge.

Manohra (Map pp124–5; ☎ 0 2477 0770; www.manohracruises.com; Bangkok Marriott Resort & Spa, 257/1-3 Th Charoen Nakorn; 1550B) Another restored rice barge, Manohra is the grandest of them all. Cruises at 7.30pm to 10pm.

Wan Fah (Map pp108–9; ☎ 0 2222 8679; www.wanfah.com; 1200B) Also departing from Tha Si Phraya, Wan Fah's barge cruise (7pm to 9pm) is the cheaper of the lot.

Yok Yor Restaurant (Map pp108–9; ☎ 0 2439 3477; www.yokyor.co.th; dinner 300-320B) This long-running floating restaurant on the Thonburi side of the river also runs a dinner cruise (8pm to 10pm) for the average folks, mainly Thais celebrating birthdays. Add 120B surcharge to the prices quoted here.

just right. This informal kitchen, operated by a Burmese cook of Nepali descent, assembles a mean meat-free thali. Cap off your meal with a visit to **Kathmandu** (p192), the photography gallery across the street, and you'll soon forget which part of Asia you're actually in.

MUSLIM RESTAURANT

Map pp108–9 Thai-Muslim \$
☎ 0 2234 1876; 1354-56 Th Charoen Krung, Riverside; mains 30-90B; ☎ 10am-8pm; ☎ ordinary 35, 36, 75 & 93, 🍴 Tha Oriental

Plant yourself in any random wooden booth of this ancient eatery for a glimpse into what restaurants in Bangkok used to be like back in the day. The menu, much like the interior design, doesn't appear to have changed much in the restaurant's 70-year history, and the biryanis, curries and samosas are still more Indian-influenced than Thai.

NAAZ

Map pp108–9 Thai-Muslim \$
☎ 0 2234 4537; 24/9 Soi 45, Th Charoen Krung, Riverside; mains 40-90B; ☎ 8.30am-10pm Mon-Sat; ☎ ordinary 35, 36, 75 & 93, 🍴 Tha Oriental Hidden in a nondescript alleyway is Naaaz (pronounced *Nát*), a tiny living-room kitchen serving some of the city's richest *kháo mòk kái* (chicken biryani). Various daily specials include chicken masala and mut-ton korma, but we're most curious to visit on Thursdays when the restaurant serves something called Karai Ghost.

NGWAN LEE LANG SUAN

Map p112 Thai-Chinese \$
☎ 0 2250 0936; cnr Soi Lang Suan & Th Sarasin, Lumpini; mains 150-300B; ☎ 6pm-3am; 🍴 Ratchadamri

This cavern-like staple of copious consumption is still going strong after all these decades. If you can locate the entrance, squeeze in with the post-clubbing crowd and try some of those dishes you never dare to order elsewhere, such as *jáp chái* (Chinese-style stewed veggies) or *hòy laay phát nám phrik pháo* (clams stir-fried with chilli sauce and Thai basil).

RAN NAM TAO HU YONG HER

Map pp108–9 Chinese \$
☎ 0 2635 0003; 68 Th Narathiwat, Silom; mains 40-205B; ☎ 11am-10pm; 🍴 Chong Nonsi

Although the name of this blink-and-you'll-miss-it shophouse eatery translates as 'soy milk restaurant', the emphasis here is on northern Chinese cuisine – a rarity in Bangkok. Try the Shanghainese speciality *xiao long bao* (described on the menu as 'small steamed bun'), steamed dumplings encasing a pork filling and rich hot broth that pours out when you bite into them.

SOI PRADIT MARKET

Map pp108–9 Thai \$
Soi 20, Th Silom; ☎ 10am-10pm; mains 25-75B; ☎ air-con 504, 514, 544 & 547, ordinary 15, 76, 115, 162, 163 & 164, 🍴 Surasak This blue-collar street market is a virtual microcosm of Thai cuisine. Muslims deep-fry marinated chicken in front of the mosque,

while across the way Chinese vendors chop up stewed pork leg and Isan women pound away at mortars of *sóm-tam*. Live on the edge a little and proceed past the stalls with English signs peddling the predictables.

SUAN LUM NIGHT BAZAAR

Map p112 Thai \$

Th Phra Ram IV, Lumpini; mains 50-150B; ☎ 6pm-midnight; 🍴 Lumpini Find a seat (as far from the stage as possible if you value your eardrums), order a draught *hefeweizen* and a dish of deep-fried soft-shell crabs, and settle down for an evening of typically tasty Thai entertainment. Although the live music performances might not be everybody's taste, the combo of decent eats and copious beer tends to tip the scales. There is talk that Suan Lum is slotted for the wrecking ball in 2008, but until the bulldozers arrive, we're remaining sceptical.

THANON SUKHUMVIT

Th Sukhumvit is Bangkok's international avenue. Running through the immigrant community of Little Arabia at Soi 3/1, past the girlie bars around Nana, and skirting the well-heeled Thai and executive expat neighbourhoods further east, there's hardly a cuisine not represented here. You wouldn't come to Sukhumvit to eat Thai, but you do come for everything else, from hummus to burgers.

LE BANYAN

Map pp118–19 French \$\$\$
☎ 0 2253 5556; www.le-banyan.com; 59 Soi 8, Th Sukhumvit; mains 350-2000B; ☎ 6.30-9.30pm Mon-Sat; 🍴 Nana

Sukhumvit's trendy diners demand change every six months: new menu, new décor, new chef, anything to chase away restaurant boredom. But for the monogamous eaters who value a stiff-lipped experience, this classy French restaurant proves its dinosaur wisdom with formal efficient service and traditional fare. A lush garden surrounds the charming house illuminated with candles and gleaming wine glasses. The house speciality is pressed duck, but the seared foie gras steals the show.

BED SUPPERCLUB

Map pp118–19 International \$\$\$
☎ 0 2651 3537; www.bedsupperclub.com; 26 Soi 11, Th Sukhumvit; set menu 1000B; 🍴 Nana

It's the modern equivalent of breakfast in bed, except that it's not breakfast, and your 'bed' is a gigantic white tube that you share with other diners. Regardless, leave your nightclothes at home and come by on Fridays when Kiwi head chef Paul Hutt takes the best of what he can get his mitts on and transforms it into a surprise four-course menu. There are three seatings per evening Sunday to Thursday and one seating at 8.30pm on Friday and Saturday.

LA PIOLA

Map pp118–19 Italian \$\$\$
☎ 0 2250 7270; lapiolabkk@hotmail.com; 31/4 Soi 11, Th Sukhumvit; full/small set menu 1200/900B; ☎ 6-10pm Tue-Sat; 🍴 Nana

What a charming Italian eatery this is. The highlight here is the fixed menu; the only choice you make is what to drink. Three courses, including antipasto, three pasta mains and dessert, will effortlessly appear while the crowd is serenaded with Italian karaoke. You'll leave unimaginably full and drunk with flavours.

BEI OTTO

Map pp118–19 German \$\$\$
☎ 0 2262 0892; www.beiOTTO.com; 1 Soi 20, Th Sukhumvit; mains 170-850B; ☎ 6-11.30pm Mon-Sat, 11.30am-2.30pm Sun; 🍴 Asoke, 🍴 Sukhumvit

Claiming a Bangkok residence for nearly 20 years, Bei Otto's major culinary bragging point is its pork knuckles, reputedly the best in town. A good selection of German beers and an attached delicatessen with brilliant breads and super sausages make it even more attractive to go Deutsch.

KUPPA

Map pp118–19 International \$\$\$
☎ 0 2663 0450; 39 Soi 16, Th Sukhumvit; mains 180-420B; ☎ 10.30am-11.30pm Tue-Sun; 🍴 Asoke, 🍴 Sukhumvit

For Bangkok's ladies who lunch, Kuppa is something of a second home. Resembling an expansive living room, this place fancies itself as a 'tea and coffee trader' and the coffee is truly among the best in town. Thankfully the eats are just as good, in particular the spot-on Western-style pastries and sweets.

Kuppa is located a long walk down Soi 16; to find it, simply look for the Mercedes-laden car park peopled with loitering chauffeurs.

FOOD COURT FRENZY

For most residents of Bangkok, eating is as important a part of shopping, as er... shopping is. Thus every mall worth its escalators has some sort of food court. In the recent past these were the abode of middle-class Thais; the food was cheap, the settings bland, and you were even expected – horror of horrors – to carry your own tray. In recent years, however, food courts have moved upmarket, and the setting, cuisine and service have elevated accordingly.

Central Chitlom's **Food Loft** (Map pp98–9; 7th fl, Central Chitlom, Sukhumvit) pioneered the concept of the up-market food court, and mock-ups of the various Indian, Italian, Singaporean and other international dishes aid in the decision-making process. The Loft also features monthly promotions that highlight such cuisines as Spanish, or dishes using organic produce from the north of Thailand. Upon entering, you'll be given a temporary credit card and will be led to a table. You have to get up again to order at the counters, but the dishes will be brought to you. Paying is done on your way out.

The **MBK Food Court** (Map pp98–9; 6th fl, Mahboonkrong Centre, Siam Sq), the granddaddy of the genre, offers tens of vendors selling food from virtually every corner of Thailand and beyond. Standouts include an excellent vegetarian food stall (stall C8), whose mock-meat mushrooms almost taste better than the real thing, and a very decent Isan food vendor (C22). **The Fifth**, on the 5th floor of the same mall, emphasises international eats in a slightly more upmarket setting.

Emporium's **Park Food Hall** (Map pp118–19; 5th fl, Emporium, Sukhumvit) brings together some of the city's most well-known international food vendors, including Indian food by Face at aloo, Vietnamese by Madam Nga, Italian by Fallabella and even acceptable Tex-Mex at Sunrise Tacos. **Emporium Food Hall**, on the same floor, features cheaper, mostly Thai-Chinese food, and what must be the cheapest meal with a view in town. Try the mercilessly spicy curries at Sakul, or the Phitsanulok-style noodles, served topped with the Thai equivalent of tempura. As with most food courts of this manner, paying is done by buying coupons at the windows in the entrance. Be sure to leave these in your pocket until the next day when it's too late to get a refund; it's an integral part of the food court experience.

GREAT AMERICAN RIB COMPANY

Map pp118–19 American \$\$\$

☎ 0 2661 3801; www.greatrib.com; 32 Soi 36, Th Sukhumvit; mains 165-400B; ☎ 11.30-11.30pm; 📍 Thong Lor

The term 'barbecue' often inspires images of grilled meat, but slow-cooking as it's done in the American south is entirely another beast altogether. Avoid the burgers at this blandly named but popular joint, and stick to the fall-apart-at-the-touch Memphis-style ribs and rich pulled pork.

RUEN MALLIKA

Map pp118–19 Thai \$\$\$

☎ 0 2663 3211; www.ruenmallika.com; sub-soi off Soi 22, Th Sukhumvit; ☎ 11am-11pm; mains 200-350B; 📍 Asoke

Thai restaurateurs have tourists figured out: convert an old teak house into a restaurant and the crowds will come, regardless of the food. Ruen Mallika ups the ante by offering exquisite dishes, like dizzyingly spicy *naam phrik* (a thick dipping sauce with vegetables and herbs) and soulful chicken wrapped in banana leaves. The surrounding garden supplies the ingredients for the deep-fried flower dish, a house speciality. The restaurant is a little tricky to find; approach from Soi 22 off Th Ratchadapisek.

FACE

Map pp118–19 Indian/Thai \$\$\$

☎ 0 2713 6048; www.facebars.com; 29 Soi 38, Th Sukhumvit; mains 150-400B; ☎ 6.30-10pm Mon-Fri, 6.30-11pm Sat & Sun; 📍 Thong Lor

Housed in several interconnected Thai-style wooden structures, this handsome dining complex is essentially two very good restaurants in one. **Lan Na Thai** does flawless domestic with an emphasis on regional Thai dishes, while **Hazara** dabbles in exotic-sounding 'North Indian frontier cuisine.' To make matters even better, Visage, the café-bakery next door, prepares some of the best cakes and chocolates in Bangkok.

CRÊPES & CO

Map pp118–19 French \$\$

☎ 0 2653 3990; 18/1 Soi 12, Th Sukhumvit; mains 140-350B; ☎ 9am-midnight; 📍 Asoke, 📍 Sukhumvit

Want to pretend you're part of Bangkok's expat community? This cute cottage crêperie, another 50m down the same soi as Cabbages & Condoms, is a good place to start. The homely setting and excellent service, not to mention a menu that offers much more than the restaurant's name suggests, keep the desperate housewives of Bangkok's diplomatic corps coming back again and again.

TAMARIND CAFÉ

Map pp118–19 International Vegetarian \$\$

☎ 0 2663 7421; www.tamarind-cafe.com; 27 Soi 20, Th Sukhumvit; mains 120-320B; ☎ 3pm-midnight Mon-Fri, 10am-midnight Sat & Sun; 📍 Asoke, 📍 Sukhumvit

Sporting a recent face-lift, this chic but casual vegetarian restaurant-photography gallery is looking better than ever. Enjoy innovative and fresh dishes under the gaze of the latest exhibition, or sneak up to the top-floor patio to sip wine and nibble on desserts with the night breezes.

BOURBON ST BAR & RESTAURANT

Map pp118–19 American \$\$

☎ 0 2259 0328; www.bourbonstbkk.com; 29/4-6 Soi 22, Th Sukhumvit; mains 150-300B; ☎ 10am-2am; 📍 Phrom Phong

Although the 'spicy' reputation of New Orleans cuisine will probably make most Thais chuckle at most, any restaurant run by a man who owns a crayfish farm, stuffs his own *andouille*, and has written a cookbook on spicy food is obviously serious about eats. Stop by on Monday, when the traditional New Orleans dinner of red beans and rice is served buffet-style. It's behind the Washington Theatre.

SPRING

Map pp118–19 International \$\$

☎ 0 2392 2747; 199 Soi Promsri 2, Soi 39, Th Sukhumvit; mains 140-350B; ☎ 11.30am-2.30pm & 5-10.30pm; 📍 Phrom Phong

The expansive lawn of this smartly recon-verted '70s-era house is probably the only chance you'll ever have to witness Bang-

kok's fair and beautiful willingly exposing themselves to the elements. The pan-Asian cuisine can be hit and miss, but the desserts, with names like Better Than Sex, are as almost good as they sound.

KALAPAPREUK ON FIRST

Map pp118–19 Thai/International \$\$

☎ 0 2664 8410; 1st fl, Emporium, cnr Soi 24, Th Sukhumvit; mains 150-300B; ☎ 11am-10pm; 📍 Phrom Phong

When Thai society types give their cooks a day off, they wander over to this airy café in the Emporium mall for *ahāan faràng* (Western food) or regional Thai specialities. The dining room is not as in-your-face hip as much of the Sukhumvit scene, but in this part of town it's pleasant to find a place where flavour takes a front seat.

ANA'S GARDEN

Map pp118–19 Thai \$\$

☎ 0 2391 1762; 67 Soi 55, Th Sukhumvit; mains 150-250B; ☎ 5pm-midnight; 📍 Thong Lor Ana's lush garden of broad-leaved palms and purring fountains will almost make you forget about the urban jungle on the other side. The spicy *yam thua phluu* (wing bean salad) and the house speciality grilled chicken, on the other hand, will leave no doubts about which city you're in.

GREYHOUND CAFÉ

Map pp118–19 International \$\$

☎ 0 2664 8663; 2nd fl, Emporium, btwn Soi 22 & 24, Th Sukhumvit; mains 110-270B; ☎ 11am-10pm; 📍 Phrom Phong

Conspicuous consumption is part of many Bangkok menus, but Greyhound still sets the pace. You could crawl into the techno soundtrack of the sleek dining room, but everyone knows that the best seats are along the main pedestrian hallway – the better to be seen. Despite the emphasis on style, the menu is diverse, the food decent, and it's good value to boot.

CABBAGES & CONDOMS

Map pp118–19 Thai \$\$

☎ 0 2229 4611; Soi 12, Th Sukhumvit; mains 150-200B; ☎ 11am-10pm; 📍 Asoke, 📍 Sukhumvit 'Be fed and be sheathed' is the motto of the restaurant outreach program of the Population & Community Development Association (PDA), a sex education/AIDS prevention organisation. And likewise,

top picks

AUTHENTIC IMPORTS

- **Gianni Ristorante** (p160) Italian not necessarily the way mama made it, but even better
- **Great American Rib Company** (opposite) A manly meal of big slabs of slow-roasted southern barbecue
- **Le Bouchon** (p162) You'll be the only one speaking English at this Francophile outpost
- **Ramentei** (p168) Feel like an authentic Japanese sarariman as you slurp your noodles
- **Ran Nam Tao Hu Yong Her** (p164) One of the few places in town to get your northern Chinese on

for many visitors to Bangkok, this quirky garden restaurant has served as an equally 'safe' introduction to Thai food. Thankfully it's done relatively well. This is a good place to gauge the Thai staples, such as the rich green curry, or the briny *phat phak bung fai daeng* (flash-fried water spinach). Instead of after-meal mints, diners receive packaged condoms, and all proceeds go towards PDA educational programmes in Thailand.

NASSER ELMASSRY RESTAURANT

Map pp118–19 Egyptian \$\$

☎ 0 2253 5582; 4/6 Soi 3/1, Th Sukhumvit; mains 80-350B; 🕒 8am-5am; 🍷 Nana

Part restaurant, part shrine to the glories of stainless steel furnishings, this popular Egyptian joint simply can't be missed. This is Muslim food, and the emphasis is on meat, meat and more meat, but the kitchen also knocks off some brilliant veggie mezzes as well. Enhance your postprandial digestion and catch up on the Arabic-language TV news with a puff on the shishah in the super-casual smoking room upstairs.

BALI Map pp98–9 Indonesian \$\$

☎ 0 2250 0711; 15/3 Soi Ruam Rudi, Th Sukhumvit; mains 100-200B; 🕒 11am-2pm & 6-10pm; 🍷 Phloen Chit

With the proprietors living directly above the dining room, homely atmosphere takes a literal interpretation at Bangkok's only Indonesian restaurant. Despite the name, the food here is not Balinese, but rather pan-Indonesian, and the restaurant serves all the expected standards (satay, gado-gado, *rijstaffel*), as well as a few, slightly more unusual dishes (young jackfruit salad, a variety of *sambels* (spicy Indonesian/Malaysian dips).

JE NGOR Map pp118–19 Thai-Chinese \$\$

☎ 0 2258 8008; 68/2 Soi 20, Th Sukhumvit; mains 90-600B; 🕒 11am-2pm & 5-11pm; 🍷 Asoke, 🍷 Sukhumvit

Je Ngor proffers banquet-sized servings of tasty Thai-Chinese dishes in a banquet-like setting. The Sukhumvit branch of this lauded Thai franchise is probably not an ideal choice for a first date, but it would be a great locale for grandma's birthday dinner. The relatively short, seafood-heavy menu features rarities such as *sôm-tam puu dawng* (papaya salad with preserved crab) and baked rice with preserved olive.

TAPAS CAFÉ Map pp118–19 International \$\$

☎ 0 2651 2947; www.tapasiarestaurants.com; 1/25 Soi 11, Th Sukhumvit; mains 90-550B; 🕒 11.30am-11.30pm; 🍷 Nana

Although it's the least expensive of Bangkok's three Spanish joints, a visit to this newcomer is in no way a compromise. Vibrant tapas, refreshing sangria and an open, airy atmosphere make Tapas Café well worth the visit. Come before 7pm, when tapas are buy-two, get-one-free. Tapas Café is located nearly next door to Suk 11 Hostel.

RAMENTEI Map pp118–19 Japanese \$\$

☎ 0 2662 0050; 593/23-24 Soi 33/1, Th Sukhumvit; mains 120-300B; 🕒 11am-midnight; 🍷 Phrom Phong

The sight of French maid-clad Thai waitresses speaking Japanese may have you wondering what you've been smoking, but the spot-on Japanese comfort food will bring you back to your senses. Located smack dab in the middle of Bangkok's Little Tokyo, this workaday ramen joint serves up a variety of authentic noodle dishes to the city's sizable Japanese expat community. Choose a seat at the open kitchen to witness your bowl being prepared, or hide yourself behind a Japanese magazine in one of several booths.

KOMALA'S Map pp118–19 Indian Vegetarian \$

☎ 0 2663 5971; 15 Soi 20, Th Sukhumvit; mains 80-200B; 🕒 11am-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-11pm Sat & Sun; 🍷 Asoke

Welcome to the McDonald's of Indian food – in atmosphere, at least. If you can forgive the form-fitting plastic furniture and reckless use of teal, this Singaporean chain puts out some wonderful south Indian vegetarian staples. Go with the crispy pancake-like *dosai*, or impress your date and order the beach ball-sized *bhattura*, a deep-fried bread that unceremoniously deflates when pierced.

BOON TONG KIAT SINGAPORE HAINANESE CHICKEN RICE

Map pp118–19 Singaporean \$

☎ 0 2390 2508; 440/5 & 396 Soi 55, Th Sukhumvit; mains 50-100B; 🕒 10am-10pm; 🍷 Thong Lor

The unofficial national dish of Singapore is treated with holy reverence at this humble eatery. After taking in the exceedingly detailed and ambitious chicken rice mani-

HOTEL BUFFET BONANZA

Perhaps we're food curmudgeons, but we've been underwhelmed by many of the highly touted hotel restaurants, which have more in common with graduation dinners at the country club than culinary orgasms. Where the hotels really excel is the mind-blowingly decadent buffets, with their fountains of chocolate, oysters on the half shell, pretty pink salmon, and dishes from every major cuisine. Move over Roman vomitoriums, we've got to do another buffet round.

At the high-end hotels, lunch buffets are typically 1000B, and dinner and brunch buffets 1500B to 2000B. Smaller hotels are significantly cheaper. Reservations are required.

Chocolate Bar (Map pp108–9; ☎ 0 2861 2888; Jester's, 1st fl, Peninsula Bangkok, 333 Th Charoen Nakhorn, Riverside; 🕒 7-11.30pm Fri & Sat) Every Friday and Saturday evening the Peninsula Bangkok offers an entirely chocolate-based buffet featuring unorthodox sweet bites such as chocolate sushi and wontons filled with ganache and essence of Earl Grey.

Colonnade Restaurant (Map p112; ☎ 0 2344 8888; 1st fl, Sukhothai Hotel, 13/3 Th Sathon, Silom; 🕒 11am-2.30pm Sun) Dah-ling you've got to brag to the neighbours about this cherry-on-top Sunday brunch. Free-flowing champagne, made-to-order lobster bisque, caviar, imported cheeses and foie gras, and a jazz trio for background music. Reservations essential, months in advance.

Four Seasons (Map pp98–9; ☎ 0 2250 1000; Four Season Hotel, 155 Th Ratchadamri, Ploenchit; 🕒 11.30am-3pm Sun) The Four Seasons' highly regarded restaurants, Shintaro, Biscotti and Madison, set up steam tables for their decadent Sunday brunch buffet.

Marriott Café (Map pp118–19; ☎ 0 2656 7700; JW Marriott, 4 Soi 2, Th Sukhumvit; 🕒 11.30am-2.30pm & 6.30-10.30pm) American-style abundance fills the buffet tables with fresh oysters, seafood, pasta and international nibbles at its daily buffet. There are also activities for children.

Oriental Hotel (Map pp108–9; ☎ 0 2655 9900; Oriental Hotel, Soi Oriental, Th Charoen Krung, Riverside) The Oriental has two options: Lord Jim's is a chic glass-enclosed restaurant that overlooks the river and serves a weekend brunch buffet of seafood. The Riverside Terrace serves evening barbecue buffets within fishing distance of the river.

Rang Mahal (Map pp118–19; ☎ 0 2261 7100; 26th fl, Rembrandt Hotel, 19 Soi 18, Th Sukhumvit; 🕒 11am-2.30pm Sun) Couple views from this restaurant's 26th floor with an all-Indian buffet, and you have one of the most popular Sunday destinations for Bangkok's South Asian expat community.

Shanghai 38 (Map pp108–9; ☎ 0 2238 1991; Sofitel Silom, 188 Th Silom; 🕒 11.30am-2.30pm) Perched on the 38th floor, this Chinese restaurant dishes up a daily dim-sum buffet and a panoramic view. On weekends the buffet includes roast suckling pig and Peking duck.

festu written on the walls, order a plate of the restaurant's namesake and witness how a dish can be so simple, yet so delicious. And while you're there you'd be daft not to order *rojak*, the spicy/sour fruit 'salad', which is referred to here tongue-in-cheek as 'Singapore Som Tam'.

IMOYA Map pp118–19 Japanese \$

☎ 0 2663 5185; 3rd fl, Terminal Shop Cabin, 2/17-19 Soi 24, Th Sukhumvit; mains 40-120B; 🕒 6pm-midnight; 🍷 Phrom Phong

Temporarily set aside thoughts of Bangkok and whisk yourself back to 1950s Tokyo. A visit to this well-hidden Japanese restaurant, with its antique ads, wood panelling and wall of sake bottles, is like taking a trip in a time machine. Even the prices of the better-than-decent eastern-style pub grub haven't caught up with modern times.

THONGLEE Map pp118–19 Thai \$

☎ 0 2258 1983; Soi 20, Th Sukhumvit; mains 40-70B; 🕒 9am-8pm, closed 3rd Sun of month; 🍷 Asoke, 🍷 Sukhumvit

With the owners' possessions overflowing into the dining room, a heavily laden spirit shrine and tacky synthetic tablecloths, Thonglee is the epitome of a typical Thai restaurant. However, in the sea of foreign food that is Th Sukhumvit, this is exactly what makes it stand out. Thonglee offers a few dishes you won't find elsewhere, like *müu phat kà-pi* (pork fried with shrimp paste) and *mii kràwp* (sweet-and-spicy crispy fried noodles).

SOI 38 NIGHT MARKET

Map pp118–19 Thai-Chinese \$

Soi 38, Th Sukhumvit; mains 30-60B; 🕒 8pm-3am; 🍷 Thong Lor

It's not the best street food in town by a long shot, but after a hard night of clubbing on Sukhumvit, you can be forgiven for believing so. If you're going sober, stick to the knot of 'famous' vendors tucked into an alley on the right-hand side as you enter the street; the flame-fried *phat thai* and herbal fish ball noodles are musts.

YUY LEE Map pp118–19 Thai \$
☎ 0 2258 4600; 25 Soi 31, Th Sukhumvit; mains 25–60B; 🕒 10am–8pm Mon–Sat; 🍷 Asoke, 🍴 Sukhumvit

This aged but spotless eatery serves a variety of dishes, but most folks come for the northern Thai noodle duo of *khào sawy* (wheat noodles in a curry broth) and *khànmò jiiin nám ngiaw* (fresh rice noodles in a tomato and pork broth). The former, although not bad for Bangkok, can't compete with the real deal from Chiang Mai, but the latter is an excellent take on a hard-to-find dish.

GREATER BANGKOK

Although it will involve something of a schlep for most visitors, an excursion to Bangkok's suburbs can be a profoundly tasty experience. The northern reaches of the city in particular are home to heaps of restaurants that wouldn't even consider toning down their food to suit foreigners. The city's outskirts are also a particularly great place to sample regional Thai cuisine.

BAAN KLANG NAM 1 Map pp124–5 Thai \$\$\$
☎ 0 2292 0175; www.baanklangnam.net;

3792/106 Soi 14, Th Phra Ram III, Greater Bangkok; mains 200–400B; 🕒 11am–midnight; taxi from Saphan Taksin BTS station

Near Khlong Toey Port, this rustic wooden house is a favourite of the Thai matriarchs and guests at nearby Montien Riverside. The seafood is a little more expensive here than other riverside restaurants, but so is the quality. Crab, prawns, and whole white fish are among the hits that make people swoon.

LA VILLA Map pp124–5 International \$\$
Cnr Soi 6, Th Phaholyothin, Greater Bangkok; mains 180–300B; 🕒 10am–10pm; 🍷 Ari

This new mini-mall features a handsome selection of eateries, including a branch of Greyhound Café, several Japanese restau-

rants, and delicious domestic ice cream at the local chain, iberry. Homesick foreigners will also appreciate the large branch of Villa, which carries an impressive variety of imported foodstuffs.

RIVER BAR CAFÉ Map pp52–3 Thai \$\$

☎ 0 2879 1747; www.riverbar.com; 405/1 Soi Chao Phraya, Th Rachawithi, Thonburi; mains 180–300B; 🕒 5pm–midnight; 🍷 to Krung Thon Bridge pier Sporting a picture-perfect riverside location, good food and live music, River Bar Café is the epitome of a Bangkok night out. Take a seat on the deck to soak up the breezes and to avoid the enthusiastic but loud live bands inside.

NANG LOENG MARKET Map pp52–3 Market \$

Btw Soi 8–10, Th Nakhon Sawan, Central Bangkok; 🕒 10am–2pm Mon–Sat; 🌬️ air-con 72 Dating back to 1899, this atmospheric fresh market is a wonderful glimpse of old Bangkok, not to mention a great place to grab a bite. Although it seems not to have entirely recovered from a fire a few years ago, Nang Loeng is still known for its Thai sweets, and at lunchtime is also an excellent place to fill up on savouries. Try a bowl of handmade egg noodles at **Rung Rueng** (☎ 0 2281 9755; 62/147 Soi 8, Th Nakhon Sawan), or the wonderful curries across the way at **Ratana** (☎ 0 2281 0237).

ROSDEE Map pp124–5 Thai-Chinese \$

☎ 0 2331 1375; 2357 Th Sukhumvit, cnr Soi 95/1, Greater Bangkok; mains 40–120B; 🕒 8am–9pm; 🍷 On Nut

top picks

REGIONAL VICTUALS

- **Jay So** (p163) Supreme northeastern Thai – if you can handle the heat
- **Khrua Aroy Aroy** (p163) The closest you'll get to an authentic southern Thai curry shack without hopping on a train
- **Nang Loeng Market** (above) A variety of vendors hawking true Central Thai flava
- **Wang Lang Market** (p154) A market of finger-lickin' good southern Thai
- **Yuy Lee** (left) Northern-style noodles – in the heart of Bangkok

FORAGING OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

Hop on the Skytrain heading north of central Bangkok for an impromptu food-tourist outing. Come lunchtime, Soi Ari, off Th Phahonyothin, is a street food paradise and virtually the entire spectrum of Isan and Thai-Chinese dishes is available. Excellent *phat thai* can be got at the lauded **Phat Thai Ari** (Map pp124–5; ☎ 0 2270 1654; 2/1 Soi Ari, Greater Bangkok; 🕒 10am–10pm). Soi Rang Nam near the Victory Monument is another grazing option with lots of regional Thai restaurants such as **Mallika** (Map pp52–3; ☎ 0 2248 0287; 21/36 Th Rang Nam, Greater Bangkok; 🕒 10am–10pm Mon–Sat), specialising in the foods of Thailand's southern provinces, and tasty Isan at **Tida Esarn** (Map pp52–3; ☎ 0 2247 2234; 1/2–5 Th Rang Nam, Greater Bangkok; 🕒 11am–10pm).

This stodgy family eating hall is never going to make it on to any international magazine's 'Hot Lists' of places to dine, but the elderly bow-tied staff does give the place a certain element of charm. Instead, Rosdee is known for its consistently tasty, well-executed Thai-Chinese favourites such as the garlicky *aw sùn* (oysters fried with egg and a sticky batter), or the house speciality, braised goose.

YUSUP Map pp124–5 Thai-Muslim \$

☎ 0 85136 2864; Kaset-Navamin Hwy, Greater Bangkok; mains 30–90B; 🕒 11am–2pm; taxi from 🍷 Mor Chit

The Thai-language sign in front of this restaurant boldly says *Raachaa Khào Mòk* (King of Biryani) and Yusup backs it up with flawless biryani (try the unusual but delicious *khào mòk pla*, fish biryani), not to mention mouth-puckeringly sour oxtail soup and decadent *kaeng mátsàman*. For dessert try *roti wáan*, a paratha-like crispy pancake topped with sweetened condensed milk and sugar – a dish that will send most carb-paranoid Westerners running away screaming.

To find Yusup, get in a taxi heading north from Mor Chit BTS station and tell the driver to take you to Th Kaset-Navamin (also locally known as the *sên tát mán*). Turn right at the Kaset intersection and continue about 1km past the first stop light; Yusup is on the left-hand side (look for the giant wind socks advertising the restaurant).

OR TOR KOR MARKET Map pp124–5 Thai \$

Th Kamphaeng Phet, Greater Bangkok; mains 30–60B; 🕒 10am–5pm; 🍴 Kamphaeng Phet

Or Tor Kor is Bangkok's highest-quality fruit and agricultural market, and sights such as the toddler-sized mangoes and dozens of pots full of curries are reason enough to visit. The vast majority of vendors' goods are

takeaway only, but a few informal restaurants exist, including **Rot Det**, which does excellent stir-fries and curries, and sublime Isan at **Sut Jai Kai Yang**, just south of the market.

To get here, take the MRT to Kampheng Phet station and exit on the side opposite Chatuchak (the exit says 'Marketing Organization for Farmers').

VICTORY POINT Map pp52–3 Thai \$

Th Phayathai & Th Ratwithi, Ratchathewi; mains 30–60B; 🕒 6pm–midnight; 🍷 Victory Monument In Bangkok, the best meals are always in unlikely places. Far from the foreign forces of inner Bangkok, Victory Point can be as provincial as it wants, with a squat village of concrete stalls lit in neon and a mix of super casual and delicious food vendors.

BAAN SUAN PAI Map pp52–3 Thai Vegetarian \$

☎ 0 2615 2454; Th Phahonyothin, Greater Bangkok; mains 25B; 🕒 11am–9pm; 🍷 Ari This vegetarian food centre offers a huge selection of meat-free meals served up by several vendors. Everything is strictly vegetarian, even lacking the ubiquitous fish sauce. Most plates offer the choice of three stir-fries, but there's also sushi and noodles. Don't miss the handmade ice cream of such exotic flavours as passionfruit, lemon grass and lotus root.

Purchase coupons from the woman at the desk near the entry. The coupons are printed with Thai numbers only, but the denominations are colour-coded: green – 5B; purple – 10B; blue – 20B; red – 25B.

The restaurant is just past the petrol station before Soi 4.

VEGETARIAN FOOD CENTRE Map pp124–5 Thai Vegetarian \$

Th Kamphaeng Phet, Greater Bangkok; mains 10–30B; 🕒 8am–noon Tue–Mon; 🍴 Kamphaeng Phet, 🍷 Mor Chit

Operated by the Asoke Foundation, this wholly vegetarian food centre near the Weekend Market is one of Bangkok's oldest. To find it, cross the footbridge above Th Kampaengphet, heading away from the market, and towards the southern end of Th Phahonyothin. Take the first right onto

a through street heading into the car park, and walk past the nightclubs and bars. Turn right, and you'll see a new block of buildings selling bulk food stuff. The restaurant is at the end of this strip. Prices are ridiculously low (around 10B per dish) and you buy tickets at the front desk.