

David Messiha takes a tour along the banks of the Chao Phraya to explore the exquisite restaurants and bars, and enjoy enchanting views of Bangkok's most famous waterway

A JOURNEY ALONG THE RIVER OF KINGS



The Chao Phraya is a major river in Thailand, with its low alluvial plain forming the centre of the country. It flows through Bangkok and then into the Gulf of Thailand.



music. Getting there is easy: shuttle-boat services are available from either Sathorn Rd (Saphan Taksin) or the River City Shopping Complex pier.

Riverside dining is at its best at the Oriental Hotel, renowned for entertaining famous personalities and writers like Joseph Conrad, William Somerset Maugham and Graham Greene. Your dining options are varied. Le Normandie is the finest French restaurant in South-East Asia, serving caviar, oysters, duck foie gras and other delicacies with a selection of vintage wines. One of the outstanding features of this restaurant is that all diners get an exquisite view of the Chao Phraya from the hotel's elevated rooftop.

A tantalising view is also par for the course at the Oriental's Sala Rim, located a few metres away from the hotel. Once you step into the unique teak ferryboat, you'll be entranced by the sight of illuminated temples and 19th-century buildings.

For grilled meat and seafood, get a table at the Riverside Terrace & Verandah, or if you simply want a drink, the

Bangkok is a vibrant metropolis, exuding its energy from virtually every corner, street, alley and shopping district. Its nightlife, however, isn't only limited to its cafés, bars and bustling markets. There are also many opportunities for the seasoned traveller to enjoy some of the serene and tranquil scenes of this magical city, particularly along the banks of the Chao Phraya – the “River of Kings”, named by none other than King Rama I himself.

The Chao Phraya has come a long way since then. In fact, it was because of the site of this river that King Rama I designated the capital city, Bangkok, to be erected where it is back in 1782. Not only did he establish the city close to the riverbanks, but he also supported the building of some of the world's most iconic temples.

Bit by bit, the Chao Phraya became the city's lifeline. Locals use its ferries as a means of transport, children play and frolic in its waters and hundreds of wooden shacks surround it, while fishermen make a living from it. It's a crossroads for people from all walks of life. Spiralling condominiums and hotels surround it, while churches, temples and 19th-century civic buildings spread out from its embankments. Kilometres away you can spot women in wooden shacks selling noodles, *pad Thai* (stir-fried rice noodles), fish cakes and other traditional Thai snacks to hungry sailors and fishermen, while on a busy day you'll see masses boarding a boat or a ferry from one of the many piers to get to work or home.

It's this contrast of life in and around the Chao Phraya that makes it truly fascinating.

From cruising to dining or simply enjoying the scenery, there's a lot to explore along the banks of the river. Among the many interesting places you can visit are the Grand Palace, the Wat Arun Temple and the Asiatique night market. If you're in the mood for a drink or a cocktail, pop into the Three Sixty Jazz Lounge at the Millennium Hilton. The best time to visit the Three Sixty Jazz Lounge is in the late afternoon, so you can enjoy the sunset over Bangkok from its location on the 32nd floor, while listening to live





renowned and recently refurbished Bamboo Bar is one of the most iconic jazz spots in Bangkok.

Cocktail specialist Aquatini serves awesome drinks and cocktails, as well as Thai fusion dishes. Its open-air bar concept and candlelit ambience permeates its indoor and outdoor setting, as jazz plays softly in the background.

If hotel dining isn't for you, enjoy authentic fine Thai dining at the Supatra River House, originally the home of Supatra Singholaga, a Thai businesswoman and leading women's rights advocate who established the Chao Phraya River Ferry Company. The home of this

ONCE YOU STEP INTO THE UNIQUE TEAK FERRYBOAT, YOU'LL BE ENTRANCED BY THE SIGHT OF ILLUMINATED TEMPLES AND 19TH-CENTURY BUILDINGS.

icon was converted into a restaurant in 1998, which has three dining areas overlooking the Chao Phraya, with an open-air terrace and great views of the Grand Palace.

Every Saturday night crowds are entertained by traditional Thai dancing.

When darkness falls, river traffic doesn't stop. Tour boats and river cruisers appear, adding to the pleasure and colour on the waters and a nightlife trip to the Chao Phraya isn't complete without cruising on one of these vessels. For a truly remarkable river experience, one of the most luxurious options is the *Grand Pearl Cruise*. The boat tour passes all the major sights across the city, such as the Temple of Dawn, the Emerald Buddha and Bang Khunphrom Palace.

You'll be welcomed with a drink upon arrival, before settling down to your dining table, ready to enjoy the international buffet and dance shows. A live band plays the latest dance hits. The well-lit venue provides the perfect conditions for taking great holiday photos.

Whether you're on a budget or have money to spend, the entertainment and dining options are endless – and whatever you choose, you'll feel like royalty along the River of Kings. 🌈

Address guidebook

Three Sixty Jazz Lounge Millennium

Hilton: 123 Charoen Nakhon Rd, Khlong Ton Sai, Khlong San.
Tel: +66 2 442 2000.

Visit: www3.hilton.com/en/hotels/thailand/millennium-hilton-bangkok-BKKHITW/dining/index.html

Le Normandie and the Bamboo Bar Oriental Hotel:

Mandarin Oriental Bangkok,
48 Oriental Ave. Tel: +66 2 659 9000 ext 7393.

Visit: www.mandarinoriental.com/bangkok/fine-dining/the-bamboo-bar

Sala Rim Naam: 48 Oriental Ave.

Tel: +66 2 437 3080 ext 7333.

Visit: www.mandarinoriental.com/bangkok/fine-dining/sala-rim-naam

Aquatini: 45/1 Phra Athit Rd, Phra Nakorn, Banglampoo (Khao Sarn Rd). Tel: +66 2 280 9955.

Supatra River House: 266 Soi Wat Rakhang, Arunamarin Rd, Siriraj Bangkok Noi.
Tel: +66 2 411 0305.

Visit: www.supatrariverhouse.net

Grand Pearl Cruise: 123-125 Soi Charoennakorn Rd, Klongtongsai Klongsan.

Tel: + 66 02 861 0255.

Visit: www.grandpearlcruise.com