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By **Finn-Olaf Jones** Photographs by **Lauryn Ishak** Feb 2, 2023

Bangkokians have been busy: Travelers returning to “the City of Angels” after even a few years will notice changes. The impenetrably jammed streets of Chinatown and Old Town, with their glorious religious and royal enclaves, are finally accessible by mass transit with the extension of the Metropolitan Rapid Transit subway. And the long-neglected waterfront of the Chao Phraya River now has two massive, eye-popping developments on opposite banks: the Icon Siam mall and the Four Seasons complex of restaurants, a water garden and a gallery. Meanwhile, a new generation of chefs, designers and artisans has taken advantage of the pandemic lull to open businesses throughout Bangkok, bringing more flair and fun to an already flamboyant city.

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Recommendations

Key stops

- **Prasart Museum** is a lush hideaway showcasing ancient Thai design, architecture and gardening techniques.
- **Potong** is a newcomer serving Michelin-starred, Thai-Chinese fusion in a former pharmacy in Chinatown.
- **Co van Kessel** offers epic yet safe bike tours through Bangkok's urban jungle and into the countryside.

Restaurants and bars

+

Shopping and attractions

+

Getting around

+

Where to stay

+

Itinerary

Friday

7 p.m. **Try Thai fine dining, family style**

The chef Thitid “Ton” Tassanakajohn, a co-owner of the Michelin-starred Bangkok restaurant Le Du, last year opened Lahnyai Nusara, an intimate restaurant in a living-room-like space amid the



Courtesy of Lahnyai Nusara

Sathorn district's skyscrapers. Get a reservation for one of the half-dozen tables overseen by family photographs and embark on Ton's 12-course menu, based on a cosmopolitan approach to his mom's recipes, like steamed egg with crab meat and truffles. Dinner with wine is around 3,800 Thai baht, or about \$115, per person.

9 p.m. **Dance into the night**

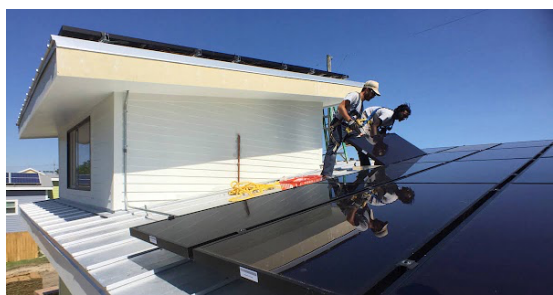
Dress shamelessly and let Thai D.J.s vibrate away your jet lag at Sing Sing Theater, the current reigning nightclub in Sukhumvit, with a noirish retro-Chinese décor illuminated by swarms of red lanterns and a riot of professional dancers behind screens and on swings that give the place the feel of a Baz Luhrmann film set. Settle into the intimate nooks and balconies surrounding the stage and dance floor or house shuffle with a cordial mix of wealthy locals and Bangkok's expat community, including, at the moment, quite a few exiled Russians. Guest D.J.s and live bands come in for regular parties such as burlesque or Latin nights. Drinks start at 180 THB.



Over the past decade, Bangkok has become one of Asia's great mixology destinations. One of the city's hottest newcomers, Tropic City, a Thai take on a tiki bar, features a dizzying array of rum cocktails.

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Saturday

7 a.m. **Bike through city and country**



In the 1990s, Co van Kessel, a Dutch-born resident of Bangkok who died in 2012, pioneered elaborate, yet surprisingly easy bicycle tours through the city and its surrounding farmland that used canal boats to move between town and country. Today, a friendly staff of young, English-speaking Thai bike enthusiasts have taken up his mantle from a well-marked garage and office next to the River City shopping complex on the Chao Phraya River. Much of the clientele is still Dutch, and it's a mesmerizing and surprisingly safe trip through a maze of alleyway temples and canals (you hop into the boat with your bike), leading to paths above the paddy farms upon which the city was built, one of which provides a delicious local lunch. A five-hour tour is 1,850 THB.

2 p.m. **Get an ethereal backrub**

Visitors usually head to Wat Pho (“wat” means “temple” in many parts of Southeast Asia) next to the Grand Palace to marvel at the 151-foot reclining Buddha. But one can match the contentment on his face in a discreet building behind the temple where novices master the art of Thai massage, one of the ancient medical practices to which the wat is devoted. The massage center, Wat Pho Thai Traditional Medical School, is across from the main temple building (there’s usually a standing yellow sign in front). Sample their craft with divine foot and back massages starting from 280 THB for 30 minutes.

4 p.m. **Shop in the arts district**

Vietnam War-era military jackets? Butterfly collections? Hand-carved, Scandi-minimalist cutlery? They’re all found in the potpourri of shops, galleries and cafes of Warehouse 30, which spans seven colorfully renovated warehouses and anchors Bangkok’s thriving arts district surrounding the River City shopping center. Regenerate from all that biking and shopping in one of the complex’s most popular cafes, Mother Roaster, run by the septuagenarian super-barista Ploenpit Rianmek, affectionately nicknamed “Pa Pim,” who brews some of the best java in town (from 80 THB).



Woot Woot at Warehouse 30

7 p.m. **Dine in a former Chinatown pharmacy**

Bangkok’s Chinatown is a maze of perpetual regeneration. The district, long hemmed in by a permanent traffic jam, is now more



accessible by the extension of the subway system in 2019. Finding Potong, a restaurant in a former pharmacy in an alley off an alley, is a worthy adventure. The chef Pam Soontornyanakij is the fifth generation of her family to own and work in this building, having made a detour as a cook in Jean-Georges Vongerichten's culinary empire in New York before returning to bring Western panache to Thai-Chinese fusion. The result is dishes like a traditional corn custard that she serves with smoked salt and on brioche. Her efforts were rewarded with her first Michelin star in November. The tasting menu is 4,800 THB per person; reserve ahead.

10 p.m. **Discover secret bars**

Over the past decade, the city has become one of Asia's great mixology destinations. The best of the blossoming bar scene is within walking distance of Potong, and includes Teens of Thailand, a cozy jewel-box of a place serving up gin cocktails; Tep Bar in a former shop that specializes in a herbal liquor called ya dong and uses local fruits and spices; and one of the city's hottest newcomers, Tropic City, a Thai take on a tiki bar featuring a dizzying array of rum cocktails. Expect to pay at least 300 THB a cocktail at these bars.



Tropic City



Few do malls better than the Thais: The food court on the first floor of Icon Siam, one of two new massive developments along the Chao Phraya River, may be one of the world's best.

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Sunday

10 a.m. **Enjoy art on the river's east shore**



Art Space

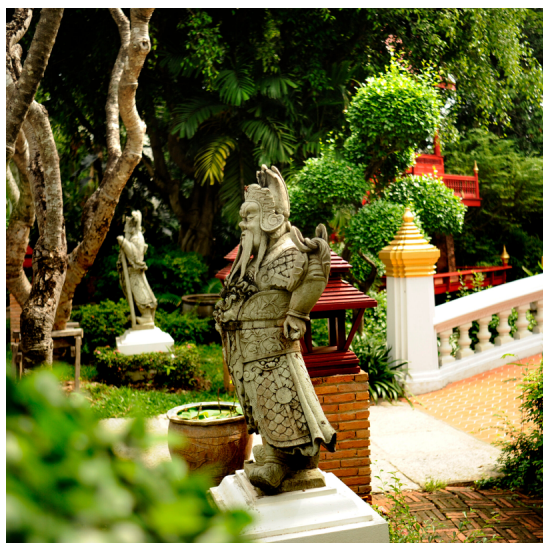
The Four Seasons complex, which opened in late 2020, has revolutionized the dreary stretch of river south of the Taksin Bridge. Escape the dense urban surroundings to airy courtyards surrounding terraced pools, outdoor art installations and banyan trees descending to the shore. Head from the lobby to the waterfront via the small contemporary museum, Art Space, a broad whitewashed studio featuring a rotating series of modern art installations curated by Bangkok's Museum of Contemporary Art. The museum shop features funky one-offs, including a blow-up 10-foot worm (65,000 THB) or customized graffiti tote bags (1,330 THB). Exit the gallery to find a popular French bakery, Cafe Madeleine, which serves excellent croissants (95 THB) and coffee on the wide riverfront terrace.

11 a.m. **Eat on the river's west shore**

Cross the river on the public ferry (from 13 THB) to Icon Siam mall. Few do malls better than the Thais: Imagine the spaceship from "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" perched on the shore (ignore all the bland Western luxury logos dominating the facade) and step into the light. The first floor has arguably the world's best food court. Thais flock to the locally run stalls that have replaced so many of Bangkok's much-missed street vendors. Many stalls don't have names and just have one specialty, like spicy shrimp soup or pad thai, often made by that vendor's family for generations. You can easily enjoy a multi-course feast for less than 200 THB. After lunch, visit the top floor balcony to discover a light-and-mirror art installation called "Infinity Forest," and one of the best views over the river.

1 p.m. **Visit a secret garden**

Between downtown and Suvarnabhumi Airport, the Prasart Museum is one of the city's best-kept secrets and an excellent introduction to Thai history and design. The lifelong passion project of former Bangkok real estate mogul, Khun Prasart, the museum is six acres of gardens and centuries-old temples, and has treasures rescued and restored from around the world. Traditional Thai artisanship is on view, from an intricately decorative style of porcelain called benjarong to the trees deliberately twisted into enchanting shapes. Sometimes Mr. Prasart is there himself, happily working his garden and greeting visitors. Make an appointment by phone first (+66 2 379 3601). Entry is 500 THB and



Agnes Dherbeys for The New York Times

includes a guided tour, usually about an hour.