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## Bangkok - like much of Thailand - has something for everyone

Apr 10, 2014 08:00 By Steve Purcell

The buzzing city takes your breath away from the very first moment - the chaotic roads, charming people, exotic smells and hustle and bustle overwhelm the senses

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### Thailand: Arun for your money

Buzzing Bangkok takes your breath away from the very first moment. The chaotic roads, charming people, exotic smells and hustle and bustle overwhelm the senses.



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New York, Paris, Peckham – I've been to them all. But this was my first experience of Asia.

And with only a couple of days before we'd swap the urban jungle for a real rainforest, and then go on to a relaxing beach, I wanted to make the most of it.

We'd travelled before the protests earlier this year that prompted the Government to declare a state of emergency, which has now been lifted.

Our base was the Royal Orchid Sheraton Hotel on the banks of the Chao Phraya River – an oasis of calm amid the heat and madness of this wonderful city.

After a hectic day of temples, boat rides and shopping for bargains, a refreshing dip in one of the hotel's two pools was ideal.

Then a mai tai cocktail in Towers Lounge on the 27th floor – it was definitely for me.

In the morning the hotel's free shuttle boat took us up river to the Skytrain – an overhead railway – as my wife Jane and I set off to find the MBK shopping centre.

This huge complex is a multi-floor mix of market and designer shops, selling real and fake goods.



Imposing: The Temple of Dawn

Even more fun than the shopping was bartering over the prices – or, if you'll pardon the pun on the Thai currency – Baht-ering.

MBK has an entire floor dedicated to food outlets, where you'll find cuisine from five continents. In fact, it's hard to go wrong with food, as excellent and cheap Thai grub is on offer everywhere.

And you'll need to be well fed to take in the Grand Palace, the Emerald Buddha and Wat Arun – the Temple of Dawn – all must-sees.

As night falls, Bangkok comes into its own.

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It has a reputation for red-light districts, but a shake of the head is sufficient for the sex show touts in the Patpong area, where there is also a vibrant street market, to drift away.

While tuk-tuks – three-wheeled motorcycle taxis – are being phased out, we jumped into one for a terrific open-air ride back to the Sheraton.

After an early start, we took the hour-long flight from Bangkok to Phuket, then went on to Elephant Hills in Khao Sok National Park, the largest area of rainforest in southern Thailand.

The camp has tents with a king-sized beds, cotton sheets and hot showers in the fully-fitted bathroom. There’s even an inviting swimming pool.

After paddling down the Sok River below towering limestone cliffs, it was time for dinner in the dining area, where a fire burns in an open grate.

We were even entertained at night with traditional Thai dancing from local schoolchildren.

But the real stars are the elephants. And you get up close and personal with them as you feed them fruit, vegetables and elephant grass.

Then you’re given coconut bristles and a hosepipe to wash the gentle giants after their playtime in a muddy watering hole.



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Buzzing: Signs in the Patpong area at night

In the morning we left for Cheow Larn Lake, which covers 103 square miles in the centre of the park, to stay at the Rainforest Camp.

There are 10 tents floating on pontoons and the nearest road is an hour away by boat.

It's luxury all the way, with a bar and trestle dining tables, where you're served food prepared by the resident staff.

Plus it's all totally eco-friendly.

You can swim in the emerald waters and take a kayak out on the lake. And you've just got to hear the jungle noises at night to appreciate them.

At dawn, our guide took us out in the kayaks to watch spectacled langurs and white-handed gibbons cavorting in the trees.

Padding down channels, we saw hornbills, an eagle and even families of monkeys.

you can track yourself into dozing off

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After all that activity, it was time to relax – and the glorious beaches of Khao Lak, swept by the azure Andaman Sea, was the perfect place.



Special: Kayakers paddling on Klong Sok River

The award-winning Le Meridien Khao Lak Spa and Beach Resort offers sheer luxury on the edge of a pristine beach, which runs for eight miles.

Our room – or rather, villa – was so fantastic we could have just stayed there.

It had its own pool and courtyard, complete with giant, pagoda-covered day bed. The hotel has a lagoon-style pool, a kids' pool, a family pool and a huge adults-only pool.

There's a whole range of treatments at Le Spa and Jane thoroughly enjoyed a body-pampering afternoon while I went off for a spot of beachcombing.

There are several restaurants and the all-day Café Lilawadee, where the breakfast buffet is served.

We tried loads of excellent food, but the gastronomic highlight of the entire trip was our candle-lit 'Dining Experience' at the Baan Thai restaurant.

We had a banquet of Thai delights, which catered for the fact that I prefer meat while Jane likes vegetarian food.

Like so much of Thailand, there's something for everyone.

## Get there

Premier Holidays has 12nts in Thailand from £1,479pp (based on two sharing, saves £850 per couple).

3nts r/o at the 5\* Royal Orchid Sheraton in Bangkok; transfer by air for 1nt f/b in a luxury tent at Elephant Hills and 1nt f/b at the floating Rainforest Camp by Cheow Larn Lake; 7nts B&B at the 5\* Le Meridien Beach and Spa Resort in Khao Lak. Inc flights from Heathrow to Bangkok

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and on to Phuket and transfers.

Valid for travel between May 16 and Jun 30. [premierholidays.co.uk](http://premierholidays.co.uk) , 08444 937 531.

**Tourist information:** [tourismthailand.org](http://tourismthailand.org) .

**Time zone:** UK +6hrs

**Currency:** Baht £1 = 50.8

**Best time to go:** Try some Thai time off this spring.

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