



# The Great Escape

With sand, sea, exotic spas and incredible culture, Escape Worldwide's Darren Vurnum shares his passion for Thailand **Pictures taken by Darren Vurnum**

**T**HAILAND is one of the most diverse long haul destinations and it can be hard to know where to visit to make the most of your holiday. From cities to beaches and temples to markets, Thailand really is one of those places that has it all.

Bangkok is like nowhere else on Earth and any trip to Thailand wouldn't be complete without a few days exploring the city. At first appearance Bangkok can come across as a noisy, chaotic mix

of highways and skyscrapers, but there's so much to the Thai capital that one visit can't do it justice. However for a first time visit, take a ride on the sky train to help you get your bearings. The air-conditioned monorail links the main areas, gliding above the traffic effortlessly. Then perhaps jump on a boat from outside the Shangri-La Hotel which will take you along the river towards the Grand Palace and give you a very different perspective of the city, all for the bargain price of around 30p! You



## One to avoid...

Getting stuck in Bangkok's chaotic traffic during rush hour as you'll be going nowhere. Stick to the sky train, underground or the river at busy times.

may also want to step away from the crowds and into the calm; Bangkok has around 450 Buddhist temples that depict a very different side of Thai daily life.

Bangkok is also a shopaholic's paradise, but it helps to know where to start. Luxury brands can be found around Chit Lom station, while the MBK shopping centre at Siam Square is a great place to hone your haggling skills. Prices here for souvenirs are fairly fixed, but are cheaper than more touristy locations such as Patpong Market, so practice here before heading out. Staying in Bangkok can be a bargain too, international standard 5\* hotels start at around £40 per person per night, and Thai hospitality is legendary, making it one of the best value places to stay in the world.

## Wind down

After a few days in Bangkok, it's time to head to one of Thailand's superb beach resorts and there are plenty to choose from. Quiet hideaways such as Koh Yao



Noi and Koh Samet are great for a total chill-out, while raucous resorts like Pattaya are perfect for the party animal. For something in between, traditional Hua Hin or relaxed Khao Lak are good choices, there is plenty of culture without being too commercial. Or head to the beaches of Southern Thailand for picture-postcard scenery aplenty at Krabi or Phuket.

Set amongst some of South East Asia's most magnificent coastal scenery, Krabi is a fairly small resort that offers quality hotels, great restaurants (the seafood is particularly good) and a relaxed vibe. The central area of Ao Nang is home to most of the restaurants, shops and bars plus great value accommodation, while top-end hotels such as the Sheraton and Ritz-Carlton are located a little further out. But with Thailand being Thailand, even the highest quality hotels offer unbeatable value for money.

### Don't miss...

The seafood restaurants overlooking the beach at Ao Nang, Krabi. Take the path close to where the longtail boats moor for the biggest prawns and best fishcakes you're ever likely to find.



Take a longtail boat to nearby Railey Beach to see the stunning limestone cliffs from the water, or hire your own speedboat for a day exploring the islands and beaches of Phang-Nga Bay, made famous by films such as *The Beach*. It's easy to see why this corner of Thailand was used as a backdrop to paradise.

With such diversity and choice it may be difficult to know where to start, but like most visitors to Thailand, you'll probably plan your second visit as soon as you get home.

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