Thailand welcomes visitors with an amazing spectrum of experiences: Historical treasures and heritage sites, tropical islands and gorgeous beaches, lush mountains bursting with waterfalls, boutique hotels, posh restaurants, high-end shopping, colorful festivals, and, of course, the warm smiles and gracious spirit of traditional Thai hospitality. Now is the perfect time to experience Thailand for yourself. Turn the page to start exploring.
Thailand is one of the world’s most magical destinations. Situated in the heart of Southeast Asia, the country offers a vast and varied array of places to explore and experience:

In the capital city of Bangkok, you’ll encounter a vibrant mix of modernity and tradition; in the country’s north you’ll discover lush mountains and ancient villages; and on the islands, such as Phuket and Ko Samui, you’ll find sun-kissed beaches and famed dive sites that attract enthusiasts from around the world. Wherever you go, you’re sure to enjoy Thailand’s world-class resorts and spas, tantalizing cuisine, spectacular shopping, and of course, the warm hospitality and heartfelt smiles of the Thai people.

EXPERIENCE “THAINESS” AT TOP RESORTS

Thailand’s stunning boutique hotels and luxurious resorts pamper visitors with sumptuous amenities, flawless service, and the unique chance to experience “Thainess,” a word used to describe all that is traditionally Thai. Throughout the country, luxury resort and hotel properties not only feature authentic Thai architecture and interior design, they also offer unique activities such as elephant trekking, which introduce you to some of the country’s most fascinating traditions. In addition, many properties are nestled away in beautiful beach or lush mountain settings, providing you with the perfect starting point for exploring Thailand’s incredible natural environment.

In Northern Thailand, Anantara’s magical Golden Triangle resort perches on a ridge overlooking the hills of neighboring Myanmar and Laos. When you’re not relaxing at the spa or in the privacy of your room or suite—all of which feature crisp Thai silks, teakwood floors, and regional artworks—you can embark on one of the resort’s intriguing activities or excursions. Glide down the Maekong River on a longtail boat and visit the ancient Northern Thai walled city of Chiang Saen; learn the art of Thai cuisine through a chef-guided visit to the local market followed by a cooking lesson; or spend a day at the on-site Elephant Camp, the northern extension of the Thai Elephant Conservation Centre, where you can learn the basic commands of elephant driving, embark on an elephant trek through a bamboo forest, or even help an elephant take a bath in the Ruak River.

At the beautiful Mandarin Oriental Dhara Dhevi, also in the north, Thai culture and tradition is a central part of the resort experience. Guests can watch demonstrations of traditional rice pounding and weaving, participate in classes such as Traditional Thai Flower Arrangement or Northern Thai Dance and Music, and take part in daily rituals such as the offering of rice to Buddhist monks on their morning alms rounds.

On Phuket, Thailand’s largest island, the sumptuous Amanpuri resort is secluded in a natural coconut grove, overlooking a crescent-shaped beach. The resort embodies the spirit of Thai culture with authentic, swooping, multi-tiered rooflines, locally inspired interiors, and outdoor salas (decks) in every guest pavilion. Amanpuri is the perfect setting for those wishing to explore Thailand’s natural underwater wonders. The resort’s dive operation, H2O Sportz, a PADI training facility, offers scintillating programs for both beginners...
and experienced divers. Excursions are available to Shark Point, which is known for tame leopard sharks, bright purple sea anemones, and schools of moray eels; Koh Dok Mai, which offers the chance to explore underwater caves and crevices; and other popular dive sites such as Ra-cha Island and Koh Kai Nok.

On the island of Ko Samui, the Napa-sai Beach Resort & Villas, an Orient-Express Hotels, Trains & Cruises property, offers sumptuous accommodations amidst 17 tropical acres overlooking the Gulf of Thailand. In addition to fantastic beach activities, the resort also offers uniquely Thai experiences: Visit the renowned Ang Thong National Marine Park, a major diving, snorkeling, and boating destination; or explore the island on the half-day Samui jungle adventure, a guided elephant trek that includes time to feed and get acquainted with your elephant before trekking along the river to the spectacular Na Muang Waterfall.

RELAX & REJUVENATE

Thailand is renowned for the outstanding quality and diversity of its spa offerings. At healing centers and spas throughout the country, traditional Asian well-being therapies have been perfectly blended with the Western spa concept to create the ultimate rejuvenating experience. Gracious hospitality and a friendly caring nature are instinctive and genuine qualities of the Thai people, which help make the Thai spa experience both authentic and exceptional. Many healing methods have been adapted from traditional Thai practices and are very similar to the techniques still used by traditional medical practitioners. Meditation, for example, reflects a deep-rooted Buddhist influence. Traditional Thai massage is considered to be an act of compassion in which the healer (therapist) practices the physical application of metta (loving kindness) and bestows a healing touch in the spirit of giving. Holistic remedies use indigenous herbs and plants to restore balance and rejuvenate the mind, body, and spirit.

FESTIVITIES

The Thailand Grand Sale 2008 (June-August) is held at participating stores throughout the country with sales on goods from around the world. In July, the Ubon Ratchathani Candle Festival & International Candle Carving Competition take place in the Thung Si Mueang District of Ubon Ratchathani province, with a welcoming ceremony for His Majesty the King’s royal candle and an international candle-carving competition. Ok Phansa Day (The End of the Buddhist Lent Festival) & Naga Fireball Phenomenon happen in October along the Mekong River in Nong Khai, with “Tak Bat Thevo” alms-giving in the morning and the phenomenon of Naga fireballs at night. In November, the Loi Krathong Festival is celebrated along the Chao Phraya River in Bangkok, with an illuminated boat procession and specially illuminated buildings and historical sites. Thais welcome the New Year with Countdown celebrations throughout the country. In Bangkok, festivities take place at the Central World Plaza and around Rattanakosin Island. Visitors can join in traditional Thai activities and make New Year wishes at nine auspicious places throughout the city. For more information:

www.tourismthailand.org/festival-event

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The Charms of Bangkok

A mesmerizing capital city, Bangkok is the cultural, political, and economic heart of Thailand—and a dazzling first stop on every visitor’s itinerary. Throughout the city’s bustling thoroughfares and waterways, tradition and modernity mingle in surprisingly close proximity, creating visual contrasts that are simply striking. Ancient temples crouch amid towers of glass and steel; open-air street markets are held alongside gleaming new shopping centers; and longtail boats glide through canals while skytrains speed by on elevated tracks. Whether it’s your first visit or one of many returns, you’re sure to be charmed by the vibrant energy and fabulous shopping, dining, nightlife, and cultural scene that define modern BANGKOK.

THE CULTURE

Bangkok is essentially the home of the kingdom’s most impressive temples, museums, and sights. Many of the cultural highlights are in the city’s historical core, Rattanakosin, which sits on a bend on the east side of the Chao Phraya River and can be visited in a day or two. Start by exploring the grounds of the awe-inspiring Grand Palace, a vast royal complex of buildings and gardens built when the capital was founded in 1782. Adjoining it, stands the royal temple, Wat Phra Kaeo, which houses the revered Emerald Buddha, which is considered the most sacred Buddhist site in the country. To the south of the palace grounds is Wat Pho, the site of the most beautiful Reclining Buddha. North of the palace is the National Museum, a treasure chest of artistic riches ranging from sculptures and bronzes to elaborate royal funeral chariots.

On the west side of the river in the Thonburi area, don’t miss the Royal Barge Museum, which houses eight of the exquisitely crafted vessels used for royal barge processions, or the landmark temple, Wat Arun (Temple of Dawn).

THE RIVER

Waterways have long been a central part of the Thai lifestyle. Bangkok was once so riddled with klongs (canals) that it was known as the Venice of the East. For visitors, exploring the Chao Phraya River and the city’s remaining canals by longtail boat or ferry is a fascinating way to experience Bangkok at its essence—and it’s a fast and easy way to navigate the city.

For a glimpse of the traditional Thai lifestyle that still exists along some of the city’s quieter waterways, take a longtail boat tour of the Thonburi canals. You’ll see vendors who paddle from house to house selling everything from hot food to plastic buckets; floating markets such as Taling Chan (Sat.-Sun.); canalside factories that use the waterways to transport their wares; and if you go in the early morning, alms-giving ceremonies. To see some of the city’s top sights, take a scenic river tour or board one of the Chao Phraya River express boats. You’ll enjoy fantastic views of Wat Arun (Temple of Dawn), Wat Pho (Temple of the Reclining Buddha), and the breathtaking Grand Palace.

THE SHOPPING

Bangkok is a shopper’s paradise, with everything from international designer fashions and accessories to exquisite Thai silk, gems, and hand-crafted items. If it’s action you’re looking for, head to one of the city’s many neighborhood markets, such as the bazaars in Chinatown, or the sprawling Chatuchak Weekend Market. For serious fashion,
head to the Ratchaprasong area, long considered one of the city’s best spots for shopping. Among the world-class shopping malls here, you’ll find Gaysorn Plaza, which offers top international brands like Louis Vuitton and Gucci; Central-World, the largest lifestyle shopping complex in Southeast Asia; the Erawan Bangkok, a luxury haven offering chic boutiques and fine dining; and Amarin Plaza, where authentic arts and crafts co-exist alongside popular dance, yoga, music, and language schools. To add to the allure, the Ratchaprasong Square Trade Association (RSTA) recently announced its “Do you have a Boarding Pass?” program, which offers special discounts for visiting shoppers through February, 2009. Just present your passport and boarding pass at participating stores and receive up to a 50% discount.

THE FOOD

With everything from world-class fine dining establishments to bare-bones noodle stalls, Bangkok’s dining scene is as wonderful and varied as its architecture. For upscale romantic Thai atmosphere, Celadon, in the Sukhothai Hotel is a good choice; as is Supatra River House, located on the Chao Phraya River across from the Grand Palace. For delectable French cuisine designed by Michelin 3-star chefs, try D’Sens on the 22nd floor of the Dusit Thani Hotel. If you’re interested in authentic Indian cuisine with a great view, head to Rang Mahal in the Rembrandt Hotel. For a late-night snack, join the locals at one of the city’s famous night markets. Vendors usually specialize in one or two dishes and different neighborhoods tend to have their own specialties.