



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: The main drag, Yaowarat Road, in Chinatown; Karmakamet Diner charms; views from Park Society at So Sofitel; a tête-à-tête with the bartender at Sugar Ray; million-dollar city views at Red Sky.



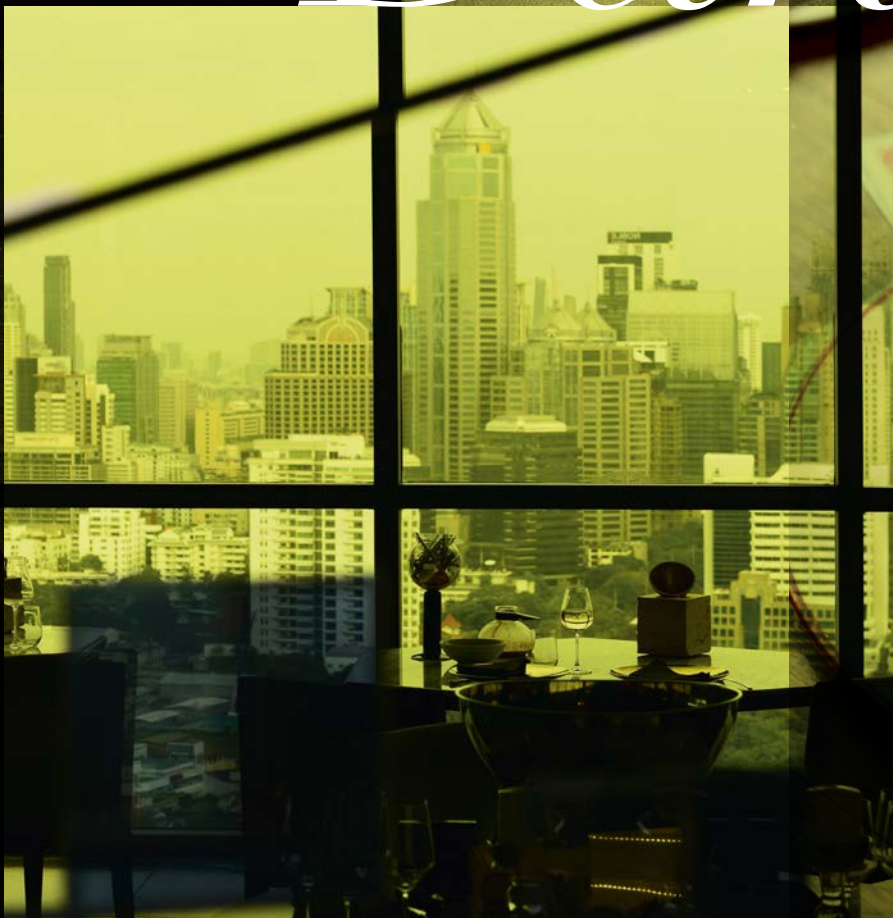
CITY HEIGHTS

Our Ultimate Tour of

Bangkok

PHOTOGRAPHED BY CHANOK THAMMARATKIT

Tourism darling Bangkok actually reveals its secrets reluctantly. With many of the best places hidden down dark sois, and with often overwhelming traffic, the Thai capital can be quite challenging for a first-time visitor to navigate beyond the glittering sacred spaces. But the metropolis is booming in every direction: there's new life in historic districts, the creative communities are flourishing, and the dining scene's broad excellence is heralded most recently by the arrival of the Michelin Guide. We'd argue that it's a great place to visit because it's a great place to live. So, on the following pages, we've recruited some of our resident contributors to help you get up to a little devilment in their favorite neighborhoods in the City of Angels.



Chinatown and Talat Noi

BY JOE CUMMINGS



Bangkok began on the Chao Phraya River, which takes its name from the first king of this ruling dynasty but was a lifeblood for the trading outpost for centuries. I've long been a fan of the older neighborhoods on the left bank. Chinatown draws me with excellent street food, fantastical neon signage, and smoky temples filled with colorful deities in flowing robes. Banglamphu, despite Khao San Road's fame as the most tourist-intense zone in Asia, still has unique family-run eateries and shops. But both 'hoods are rapidly moving beyond these aging stereotypes, combining new cool with old-school.

Ironically it's Bangkok's oldest street, Charoen Krung Road, that's one of the epicenters for change. Here the 80-year-old Central Post Office, an impressive piece of socialist architecture, houses the **Thailand Creative and Design Center** (fb.com/tcdc.thailand), whose cavernous library is my favorite co-working space. Other exciting creative reclamations are revamping 100-plus-year-old gritty spaces: **Warehouse 30** (fb.com/thewarehouse30) offers a co-working studio, bespoke boutiques, bars and cafés; across the river on the Thonburi side in architect Duangrit Bunnag's chic Jam Factory complex is **Summer House Project** (fb.com/thesummerhouseproject; Bt2,000), a favorite vantage point for watching the water while enjoying fusion seafood; and the most recent addition to this docklands renewal, **Lhong 1919** (248 Khwaeng Khlong San) converts a historic warehouse and shrine complex into a lovely 6,800-square-meter community mall of co-working space, dining outlets, and art and design shops.

Back on Charoen Krung Road, one of the city's most creative dining venues is **80/20** (fb.com/8020bkk; Bt1,800). They offer an oft-changing menu of quirky Thai-influenced dishes with fresh, local ingredients. It's a short waddle to **Tropic City** (fb.com/tropiccitybkk), where bright murals of green parrots and palm fronds herald an updated tiki bar. At nearby **Little Market Café** (fb.com/littlemarketbkk; Bt500), American chef Chet Adkins grills great burgers; he also appears down the street at **Jua** (fb.com/juabangkok; Bt1,500), a new yakitori bar with Japanese-influenced cocktails. A great night often starts at **SoulBar** (fb.com/livesoulbarbangkok), where live bands blast funk, disco, R&B and soul. There are only two places I'll order crab fried rice, and **Khao Phat Pu Talat Noi** (Charoen Krung Road at Soi Leuan Rit; Bt200), a cart 60 meters away, is one. The crab is fresh, the rice is never soggy, and it's shot through with smoky wok chi.

Dig deep into Chinatown history and visit **So Heng Tai Mansion** (fb.com/Sohengtai), a 30-room Hokkien residence 230 years old. Keeping things quirky, the owner teaches scuba diving in his four-meter-deep pool. More history can be found at resto-lounge **FooJohn Building** (fb.com/foojohnbkk; Bt1,200), a retrofitted corner edifice with an *In the Mood for Love* ambience. The ground floor kitchen does delicious French *galettes*; upstairs is American barbecue. For sunset, the best open secret is the old wooden house on the river **Samsara** (fb.com/samsarabkk; Bt800), a charming Japanese-owned, open-air café serving delicious Thai cuisine. For crafty, try **Aoon Pottery** (fb.com/aoonpottery; Bt300) a potter's studio where grilled cheese sandwiches and other comfort food is served on tableware crafted on-site.

A few years after artsy hipsters staked their claim to Soi Nana in Talat Noi, the hotspot continues to lure bars, galleries and cafés,

steadily morphing the lane into a tropical version of early 1970s New York Soho. **Teens of Thailand** (fb.com/teensofthailand) sports off-the-charts hipness and a bar focusing on gin. The same team has just opened **Asia Today** (fb.com/asiatodaybar) across the lane to tout rum. Walk through the shuttered doors at **One Day Wallflowers** (fb.com/onedaywallflowers) to enter a world of floral color and fragrance. Bangkok's fetish for Chinese-themed bars continues with **Ba Hao** (fb.com/8bahao), where neon calligraphy and minimal restoration capture Hong Kong cool. At **Tep Bar** (fb.com/teparth), traditional Thai musical ensembles and Thai herb-infused alcohol are the rule. But my favorite bar on Soi Nana is **23 Bar & Gallery** (92 Soi Nana), a true dive with a 100-percent rock-and-roll playlist.

Eiah-Sae (103-105 Soi Phat Sai), the oldest café in town, still serves Hokkien-style coffee and chargrilled toast with coconut custard in a lane that until 1954 was home to the largest opium den in the world. Don't miss **Chao Mae Kuan Im Shrine** (39 Soi Phat Sai) for its striking statue of Guan Yin, the Chinese goddess of mercy, carved from a single teak log 900 years ago and smuggled to Bangkok during China's Cultural Revolution. I never tire of exploring the labyrinthine interiors of Chinatown's largest and liveliest temple, **Wat Mangkhon Kamalawat** (Charoen Krung and Mangkon roads).

Grab a table near the semi-outdoor kitchen at **Nai Mong Hoi Thod** (fb.com/hoithod539; Bt350) to watch the cook fry oyster omelets over charcoal. Tile-walled **Jok Kitchen** (23 Soi Isaranuphap; Bt1,200) holds only four tables. Jok, the sole cook and owner, once sold crab—the star of the show here. Check it out before Anthony Bourdain discovers it. Also must-visit: **Khao Kaeng Jek Puay** (427 Mangkon Rd.; Bt70), a street-food institution of tasty curries. There are no tables, just a row of plastic chairs facing the street. The Chinese red-and-gold fetish scheme hits a peak at new arrival **Rabbit Hill** (fb.com/rabbithillbkk), which serves beer from Hong Kong's Moonzen Brewery and Japanese plum liquors.

Exiting Chinatown northward makes an interesting transition, going from commercial chaos to the religious and ministerial order of Koh Ratanakosin. Just down the street from legendary Wat Pho, **Err Urban Rustic Thai** (fb.com/errbangkok; Bt800), a casual eatery of delicious locavore Thai, is a good spot to fill the stomach and contemplate the difference.

*Restaurant prices throughout are approximate costs for a meal for two without drinks, unless noted.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Renovated warehouse—chic at Lhong 1919; Thailand Creative and Design Center, in the old Central Post Office; yakitori at Jua; fiery street food on Yaowarat in Chinatown; curry worth queuing for at Khao Kaeng Jek Puay; inside the labyrinth of Wat Mangkhon Kamalawat, Chinatown's largest temple.





CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: Seeing pink at Namsaah Bottling Trust; Japanese with aplomb at Kombawa; browsing Kathmandu Photo Gallery; inside Kombawa; the century-old Sri Mariamman Hindu Temple; pretty plating at Park Society in So Sofitel.

Sathorn and Silom

BY DUNCAN FORGAN

It is hard to believe how recently Sathorn and Silom were more business than pleasure. Sathorn was built as a canal to ship goods and though it was first lined with villas, since Thailand's industrialized rise, the lands between the Chao Phraya River and Lumpini Park have been all commerce. But the nominal CBD has evolved into one of the most rounded lifestyle packages in the capital: outward-looking, sophisticated and with enough quirk to keep it from getting dull.

When I feel low on culture I can replenish at the century-old Hindu shrine **Sri Mariamman Temple** (2 Pan Road) and among the art displays at **Gallery Ver** (vergallery.com) and **Bangkok CityCity Gallery** (bangkokcitycity.com). When I am hungry I can graze on degustation tasting menus. When thirsty, I can disgrace myself at late-night dive **Wong's Place** (fb.com/wongs-place). And when I feel regretful the next day, I can reflect in the tropical shade of Lumpini Park.

To be fair, Silom (home of the daddy of red-light districts and a gay-friendly nightlife strip) has long been famous for after-dark devilment. But Sathorn too has let its hair down. The nerve center of

these twin 'hoods is by the iconic, pixelated, new MahaNakhon Tower that, at 314 meters, is the country's tallest. Next door in MahaNakhon Cube are Japanese fusion fare **Morimoto** (morimotobangkok.com; Bt2,000), and **L'Atelier de Joel Robuchon** (robuchon-bangkok.com; Bt10,000), the newest Michelin-starred outpost of the French super chef's culinary empire.

It's a short hop to the bijou, leafy enclave of Sathorn Sois 10 and 12. After eggs Benedict at **Rocket** (rocketcoffeebar.com; Bt1,000), drop into **H Gallery** (hgallerybkk.com) for an art fix, have happy hour at **Revolucion** (fb.com/revolucioncocktailbangkok), then sustainable, creative plates at **Bunker** (bunkerbkk.com; Bt2,500) and a nightcap at lively **Café de Stagiaries** (cafestagiaries.com). Another self-contained gem is Soi Suan Plu—an alluring blend of earthy

chaos and elevated aesthetics. The former plays out via the riot of street food on **Suan Plu Soi 8**. The latter, in beautiful shophouses such as Japanese restaurant **Kombawa** (kombawa.com; Bt2,500), and **Smalls** (fb.com/smallsbkk), a broad church of a bar that fosters wild abandon amid a dimly lit air of convivial cool. **Junker & Bar** (*Suan Plu at Soi 1*) mixes great-value drinks. On Soi Yenakart, find Michelin-starred **Suhring** (restaurantuhring.com; Bt6,000), for German fine dining (no, really, it's amazing), and gallery-by-appointment **YenakArt Villa** (yenakartvilla.com). Spend an evening on Soi Convent with the chabby **Vesper** (vesperbar.co) providing craft cocktails, and the ballast coming from new Mediterranean eatery **Via Maris** (viamarisbkk.co; Bt1,700), French institution **Indigo** (66-2/235-3268; Bt2,000) or the cozy, cool **Eat Me** (eatmerestaurant.com; Bt3,000).

Within two minutes of my apartment, I can sample intricate Michelin-starred French at **J'aime by Jean-Michel Lorain** (jaime-bangkok.com; Bt8,000) or laid-back Italian **La Casa Nostra** (fb.com/lacasanostrabkk; Bt2,500). In 10, I'm eating Italian, dry-aged meats at **Il Fumo** (ilfumo.co; Bt3,000), on one of chef Fatih Tutak's whimsical culinary journeys at **The Dining Room at the House on Sathorn** (thehouseonsathorn.com; Bt5,000), or getting spiced at **Issaya Siamese Club** (issaya.com; Bt2,000), **Le Du** (ledubkk.com; Bt7,500) and **Nahm**, which also has a star, (comohotels.com; Bt7,500), all titans of modern Thai cuisine. For elevated Italian, the choice options include **Opus** (wbopus.com; Bt3,000), **La Scala** (sukhothai.com; Bt3,000) and

Zanotti (zanotti-ristorante.com; Bt3,000). And it is generally agreed the Peking duck at **Chef Man** (chefmangroup.com; Bt2,500) is the best in town.

Nightlife here is slightly more subdued than over on Sukhumvit. But serene sundowners overlooking Lumpini greenery can be had at **Park Society** (so-sofitel-bangkok.com). **Maggie Choo's** (fb.com/maggiechoos) continues to enchant with its Shanghai-bordello vibe and its left-field theme nights. Hot pink **Namsaah Bottling Trust** (fb.com/namsaahbottlingtrust) stands out for its Thai-inspired cocktail list. Grittier by far is **Jam** (jambkk.com), which revels in its divey, bohemian persona with experimental music and arthouse screenings.

Other chill spots span the venerable **Kathmandu Photo Gallery** (kathmanduphotobkk.com) and literary haven the **Neilson Hays Library** (neilsonhayslibrary.com), while the **Goethe Institute** (goethe.de) has regular German-inflected film screenings and exhibits. It also possesses one of the city's most pleasant outdoor swimming pools—a godsend in one of the world's hottest metropolises.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: The beloved Erawan Shrine houses the Thai representation of the Hindu god Brahma; the teak Jim Thompson House is a must-see for a reason; attention to detail at Gallery Drip; fresh fish at Fillets. OPPOSITE FROM TOP: The old-school Scala Theater; treats at the Erawan Tea Room; a master chef at tiny Sushi Zo; the convivial Water Library Brasserie.



Siam and Phloenchit

BY ASHLEY NIEDRINGHAUS

Anchored by Thailand's glitziest malls, surrounded by leafy embassies and dotted with top tables, this ever-beating heart of the city, which, if you're keeping track, includes Phloenchit, Rajadamri and Wireless roads, balances mass appeal with its distinctly highbrow attitude. I called this neighborhood home for two years when I first moved to Thailand, and the wide sidewalks and proximity to verdant Lumpini Park were a familiar comfort to New York City. Like Manhattan, there's glitter, fashion, history and charm—plus the best fried chicken in the city.

Exit the BTS at Phloenchit and hang a U-turn for Soi Ruamrudee, where you'll find an unpretentious taste of Tuscany at **Lenzi** (lenzibangkok.com; Bt2,000). Leaving without the meat and cheese platter from the family's Italian farm would be a crime. Swing by **Hyde & Seek** (hydeandseek.com), a gastro-pub with a long list of well-made and creative cocktails. Afterwards, satisfy a Tex-Mex craving with a burrito and fresh guacamole at **La Monita Taqueria** (lamonita.com; Bt650). From the end of the soi, juke left, then right and left again to find the fried chicken magnet: **Soi Polo** (Bt350), has a perma-line of locals salivating for the fried garlic chicken with sticky rice. Lick your fingers clean and head to Wireless Road for a pair of fine-dining stars. Michelin-starred **Savelberg** (savelbergth.com; Bt6,000) is a modern French spot named for the Dutch chef who is in the kitchen most nights. The Thai branch of acclaimed **Sushi Zo** (sushizobangkok.com; omakase from Bt6,000) is an intimate nook where the lengthy omakase menu is a dream you'll never want to wake up from.

The futuristic Central Embassy is gaining traction, but tables, and their famous soupy *xiao long bao*, are still always available at **Din Tai Fung** (dintaifung.com.sg; Bt1,300). **Water Library Brasserie** (waterlibrary.com; Bt3,000) is a fave for hearty French classics. Celeb chef Ian Kittichai's classes at **Issaya Cooking Studio** (issayastudio.com) teach innovative recipes that rise above common green curry. Up top, **Penthouse** (bangkok.park.hyatt.com) includes a roof terrace, cocktail bar and whisky room.

Top restaurants and art galleries are found on Soi Langsuan and Rajadamri Road. Culture vultures get their fix at **100 Tonson Gallery** (100tonsongallery.com), a charming villa that

woos international artists, **Tang Gallery** (tangcontemporary.com), a contemporary space with Chinese sway, and the **Foreign Correspondents' Club** (fccthai.com), an intellectual spot for talks and film screenings. Stop by the **Erawan Tea Room** (erawanbangkok.com) for high tea oozing with Thai charm, or shake joss sticks and light incense for good luck at the **Erawan Shrine** (Phloenchit and Ratchadamri roads). Nearby standouts include two modern Japanese spots: a branch of chic-izakaya **Zuma** (zumarestaurant.com; Bt3,200) boasting ace cocktails, and **Fillets** (filletsbangkok.com; Bt5,000) an omakase-style place that also does a booming trade in dry-aged beef. For a nightcap, head to the roofs at Hotel Muse's stylish **Speakeasy** (hotelmusebangkok.com) for imaginative moonshine, or **Cru** (champagnecru.com) or **Red Sky** (centarahotelsresorts.com/redsky); both of these bars are an ear-popping elevator ride from the lobby of the Centara Grand hotel. Red Sky is a breathtaking cocktail bar where prices match the million-dollar view and Cru above it excels at champagne-based mixology.

My friends Danny and Dana Garber own **The Smokin' Pug** (smokinpugbbq.com; Bt1,300), Bangkok's best barbecue spot, with mouthwatering ribs. A pair of Gaggan Anand's restaurants—**Gaggan** (eatatgaggan.com; Bt10,000), and **Gaa** (gaabkk.com; Bt6,000) run by his former sous-chef—mirror each other on a small soi. His eponymous place, known for molecular magic and a mile-long list of booking requests, snagged two Michelin stars in December.

Speaking of Michelin, a cluster of one-stars sits near the Siam BTS: **Ginza Sushi Ichi** is a meticulous temple to fresh fish (ginza-sushiichi.jp; omakase dinner Bt7,000); **Sra Bua by Kiin Kiin** (kempinski.com; Bt6,000), a branch of Copenhagen's famed restaurant, presents artful set menus that respect the flavors of Thai cuisine; while **Paste** (pastebangkok.com; Bt2,500) adds a modern touch to century-old Thai recipes.

Modern movie theaters abound in Bangkok, but **Scala Theater** (apexsiam-square.com) is a frozen-in-time gem. Beyond the grand Art Deco entrance, bow-tie clad ushers take tickets and direct visitors to their seats (don't forget to stand for the royal national anthem before the film). A crowd-pleasing spot for a casual meal is the **Central Food Hall** (centralfoodhall.com; Bt750) at Central Chidlom mall, a food court that punches far above its weight class.

Few locals bemoan taking out-of-towners to tour the stunning teak house-turned-museum **The Jim Thompson House** (jimthompsonhouse.com). Speculate on Thompson's mysterious disappearance while browsing the topnotch gift shop. In the nearby **Bangkok Art and Cultural Centre** (bac.or.th), a bastion of local culture, the artsy **Gallery Drip** (fb.com/gallerydripcoffee) is the ideal spot for a midday pick-me-up cup of single-origin coffee.

While Chinatown is ground zero for street food, two small shops are standouts in this 'hood. Behind tech-centric MBK is **Jae Oh** (113 Soi Charat Mueang; Bt150) a famous vendor that draws the crowds for *tom yum* noodles and stir-fried clams. **Jay Jia Yentafo** (564 Rama IV; Bt150) makes a popular pink soup whose fans go nuts for the homemade shrimp balls. An order of crispy pork wontons completes the meal. Neither of these places needed their recent recommendations by the Michelin Guide to draw crowds of locals.





Lower Sukhumvit

BY NICKY SHORT

When I settled upon lower Sukhumvit as my base five years ago, it was a calculated move to be near then-happening Soi 11. I didn't anticipate that even as the soi would lose its go-to party destination status and the neighborhood would become outshone by newly popular areas, it would come into its own with grace. There are fewer gimmicks, "shopportunities" and body-kinetic dancefloors here and no streetside cocktail wagons anymore, but instead a growing emphasis on atmosphere and places in which you want to linger. Smells like...maturity.

Take new Parisian bistro, **Brasserie Cordonnier** (cordonnierbkk.com; Bt2,500), enticing you with its Emmental-oozing French onion soup and then leading you upstairs to Sole Rouge, where the shoes that adorn the walls are as lovingly backlit as the liquor behind the bar. For a higher BPM: rooftop drinks at **Above Eleven** (aboveeleven.com) or make your way through a telephone box to old Cuba at **Havana Social Club** (fb.com/havanasocialbkk)—downstairs for dancing, up for cigars. After you devour the best burgers in town at **Daniel Thaiger** (fb.com/danielthaiger), a slightly scary foray to seedy Soi 13 leads to a hidden trove of creative expression at **Live Lounge** (liveloungebkk.com), with poetry, comedy or music almost nightly.

El Gaucho on Sukhumvit Soi 19 settles comfortably over three floors of sultry lighting, excellent service and solid steaks (th.elgaucho.asia; Bt3,000). But, you could forgo the striploin in favor of charcuterie down Soi 16. Here, **El Mercado** (elmercadobangkok.com; Bt2,000) welcomes you with daily chalkboard specials, and waiters so snarky about the excellent wine selection you'll feel like you're in Europe. Speaking of excellent wine, **About Eatery** (abouteatery.com; Bt2,000) is a brief hop north up Asoke. Besides something for everyone—juicy lamb chops; vegan-friendly nut cheeses—the biodynamic-heavy wine list is exceptionally clear thanks to natty owner Giulio Saverino. As a bonus, it is close to **Q&A** (qnabar.com) for a stiff nightcap in a vintage train carriage... if you can find it.

Across Asoke, behind the cheap dazzle of Soi Cowboy is a tangle of back roads connecting Sois 23, 31 and 39. In this leafy enclave is a collection of eat- and drinkeries so comprehensive that if you got lost, you'd be merrily occupied, not least by the exhibits and life-drawing classes at **Attic Studio** (fb.com/atticstudios), and the flaky criossants at **Holey** (holeybread.com). Past the 40 taps at perennially popular beer garden **Craft** (craftbangkok.com) are the leather sofas and daunting whisky and cigar menus at **Whisgars** (whisgars.com). A sneaky shortcut through the Narz club complex (nothing to see here) brings you to gourmet Italian **Enoteca** (enotecabangkok.com; degustation from Bt1,990). Across Soi 31, settle into a banquetta at Roman trattoria, **Appia** (appia-bangkok.com; Bt2,500), or fuel up for a big night with Neapolitan pizza at its trendy younger sister, **Peppina** (peppinabkk.com; Bt1,500). But the French are not to be outdone: **Le Cochon Blanc** (lecochonblanc.com; Bt2,500) roasts lobsters and ribs over a central firepit and **Cocotte** (cocotte-bangkok.com; Bt2,500) coaxes you in with cold cuts and melt-in-the-mouth tartare. So, you prefer Asian? The lines outside **Isao** (fb.com/isaobkk; Bt1,500) are worth the wait for the sinful sushi sandwich, or get authentic Cantonese—even dim sum at night—at **Hong Bao**

(hongbaorestaurant.com; Bt1,500 baht). If you're thirsty, it's tiny **Dim Dim** (fb.com/dimdimbarbkk) to the rescue with Chinese-inflected cocktails. Or, there's more evidence of Bangkok's love affair with craft beer at the Soi 33/1 branch of surgically themed **Hair of the Dog** (hairofthedogbkk.com), where the Canadian frontmen recently made a concession to liquor drinkers with The Clinic.

South of the pulsating artery of Sukhumvit, things are slower paced thanks to punctuating green spaces like Benjakitti and Benjasiri parks. Next to the latter is secret wonderland **Karmakamet** (karmakametdiner.com; Bt1,500). Overhung with trees and bursting with tasteful knickknacks, is it a café? Is it a design store? Is it a Pinterest board? Whatever, it's perfect for a cutesy date. Just as wholesome, **Veganerie Concept** (veganerie.co.th; Bt1,500) joins **Broccoli Revolution** (broccolirevolution.com; Bt1,500) in the unstoppable takeover of free-from diets and smoothie bowls.

Alternative art space **RMA Institute** (rmainstitute.net) does an adorable breakfast, while equally delightful **Friese Greene Club** (fgc.in.th) is film-geek heaven with its nine-seater cinema. In the vast new Marriott Marquis, chef Mizuho Nagao makes his buckwheat noodles fresh every day at **Soba Factory** (bangkokmarriottmarquisqueenspark.com; Bt1,500). Similarly overshadowed by the city's insistent clamor for progress is **Gedhawa** (24 Soi Sukhumvit 35; Bt800). Though almost buried by EmQuartier mall, this timeless northern Thai spot tirelessly serves grandma's recipes with no unnecessary fanfare.

But still, some remain un-encroached. Take **Indus** (indusbangkok.com; tasting menu Bt2,600 including wine): 12 years old and still lounging across its leafy lot, the ornate wooden door opens to lure you with fragrant wafts of Mughlai curries. And **Quince** (quincebangkok.com; Bt2,000), with its lazy sax-accompanied Sunday lunches, remains undisturbed by the nearby relentlessness of Thonglor or indeed **Sing Sing Theatre** (singsingbangkok.com) next door. Conceived by Bangkok's design darling Ashley Sutton, the nightspot still insists on a certain sophistication with its wrought iron dragons and Chinese lanterns, but nods to the new wave of gimmicky cocktails and trendy DJs wearing robot helmets, as if to offer you a smoother segue into the neighborhood beyond.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Friese Greene Club's nine-seat theater; behind the bar at Quince; Indian fine-dining at Indus; Havana Social transports you to old Cuba; curated design at Karmakamet Diner; regal interiors at Indus; Quince's bloody Mary is a lifesaver.



Thonglor and Ekkamai

BY JENINNE LEE-ST. JOHN

The part of town that used to be known as “Upper Sukhumvit” was a decade ago just an upscale residential enclave dotted with wedding shops, Japanese restaurants and teen clubs. Now Thonglor and Ekkamai (Sukhumvit Sois 55 and 63, respectively) are throbbing social districts, with all the traffic that entails. I don’t live far, and spend a lot of time weaving among the madness. Trust me: avoid the neon lights and overflowing porches, because there are great meals, quiet lawns and tête-à-têtes with trusty bartenders to be had.

On Sukhumvit Soi 49, hit up either part of the double-feature owned by Luca Appino. **La Bottega di Luca** (labottega.name; Bt1,700) serves up Italian regional specialties with ingredients hand-carried from the old country. Have an aperitif at 10-seater wine bar **Chez Jay** (fb.com/49terrace), then head up to Bottega’s garden deck, or scoot down the road to Appino’s third outpost of the French chateau of pizza places, **Pizza Massilia** (pizzamassilia.com; Bt1,200) for organic, wood-fired, Mediterranean-style pies. Down a residential sub-soi off Sukhumvit 51 is the literati stomping ground centered on bar/art gallery **WTF** (wtfbangkok.com) and the Brooklyn-style **Studio Lam** (fb.com/studiolambangkok), which hosts Thai bands and eclectic world

music. Nights among the street murals can feel like intimate patio gatherings, or block parties.

A soi up and a world away is the serene villa of Michelin-starred **Bo.lan** (bolan.co.th; *tasting dinner from Bt2,280*), a small-plates, Thai fine-dining specialist so dedicated to sustainability that I once ran into co-owner Dylan Jones in the middle of Phang Nga Bay plying the waters with his local-fishermen suppliers. The pioneer in casual-cool Thai, pairing genuine local food with craft cocktails, **Soul Food Mahanakorn** (soulfoodmahankorn.com; Bt1,500) is still going strong. All my visitors also love **Suppaniga Eating Room’s** (suppanigaeatingroom.com; Bt1,500) faithful family recipes from northeast and southwest Thailand. The cabbage in fish sauce tastes like candy and dances through my dreams. **Khua Kling Pak Sod** (khuaklingpaksod.com; Bt1,000) is less trendy, but the southern food hits all the right super-spicy notes.

On the subject of faithful fare, **La Dotta** (ladotta.co; Bt1,500) fashions divine hand-made pastas, and the friendly Mexican owners at **The Missing Burro** (themissingburro.com; *meal for two Bt1,000*) do the purest version of their native fare in town. Gaggan Anand keeps diversifying with wood-fired **Meatlicious** (meatliciousbkk.com; Bt3,000). Sit at the counter in **Canvas** (canvasbangkok.com; *tasting menu Bt2,600*), to witness wunderkind chef Riley Sanders conduct a perfect dance of cooks concocting innovative, locavore Thai plates.

You could spend morning to midnight in **The Commons** (thecommonsbkk.com), topped by an always-full brunch go-to, **Roast** (roastbkk.com; Bt1,000), and centered on craft-beer slinger **Brew** (fb.com/brewbkk). Leave your kids at the play place and get in a yoga or crafting class, then reconvene at the communal tables where everyone can eat what they want (Mexican; pizza; poke bowls).

For a house-music dance party, cross the street to **Beam** (beamclub.com), whose sound system in the floors ensures you literally feel the vibes. If that’s too aggressive, snag the leather couch at **Warp Wine Bar** and drink in their vast, well-priced selection of vino. In the mood for jazz? Dystopian woodland fable come-to-life **The Iron Fairies** (fb.com/ironfairiesbkk) or the intimate, Prohibition-era surrounds of **Black Amber Social Club** (fb.com/blackamber-socialclub) will please. The latter is one of a few fantastic speakeasies in this stretch of town, so if you like to sneak away from the masses and into the arms of master mixologists, seek out the unmarked doors of **Rabbit Hole** (*between Thonglor Sois 5 and 7*), **Locker Room** (*Thonglor Soi 10*), **J. Boroski** (*Thonglor Soi 9*) and, elder statesman and my favorite, **Sugar Ray** (*Ekkamai Soi 21*). Sorry, mum’s the word

on exact addresses; just look for furtive hipsters heading down dark alleys or into closets. Another hint: Sugar Ray is across from **Tuba** (fb.com/tubabkk), an original Ekkamai hangout, which looks like your teen neighbor’s rec room in the 1980s. Meanwhile, a high-tech playroom for all ages is **Game Over** (fb.com/gameoverlounge). Think: video games, giant Jenga and beer pong.

The last men and women standing will want a final destination. The choices are thumping pop remixes with wings at **Sway** (fb.com/swaybkk), or the catch-all total scene at **Chow** (fb.com/chow.bangkok), with a 24-hour kitchen.

Brunch is at **Toby’s** (fb.com/tobys38), a sweet shophouse spot whose avocado toast, crispy bacon, and fresh-blended juices will solve your Sunday. Get in a little culture at **House of Lucie** (luciefoundation.org), a gallery outpost of the American foundation dedicated to bettering the world via photography. Then stroll to Danish craft-beer house **Mikkeller** (mikkellerbangkok.com). Settle into a garden beanbag—or head **Upstairs** (upstairs-restaurant.com; *tasting menu Bt3,300*) where the once-underrated but now Michelin-starred chef Dan Bark makes a mean beer-pairing tasting menu. His swift ascension is symbolic of so much of the city’s. 📍



CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW LEFT: So many choices at Warp Wine Bar; Bo.lan is all sustainable beauty; Rabbit Hole, a Thonglor speakeasy hidden in plain sight; fresh from the fire at Pizza Massilia; Sugar Ray’s Banana Manhattan; The Commons redefines community mall; House of Lucie aims to change the world through photography.

