

# Bangkok

## Chic. Creative. Cosmopolitan.

The parallel personality of the spanky Thai capital where new-fangled meets classic and old meets edgy, is best represented in Bangkok's blossoming 'burbs'—Ari and Thonglor.

words // Punita Malhotra

**A** skyline is taking shape. From sleazy to safe. Musty to modern. Constricted to cosmopolitan. And garish to glamorous. With stylish hotels, upmarket malls, glitzy clubs and world cuisine co-existing in happy harmony with grand temples, fascinating palaces,

traditional markets and iconic street-food culture. Emerging into the international spotlight as a preferred launchpad for inventive and enterprising minds. Saying hello to creative local produce and whimsical artefacts. Presenting the hipster cool and trendy neighbourhoods of Ari and Thonglor.





### **ARI REDEFINES AVANT-GARDE**

Visitors looking to escape the relentless traffic-laden roads and dazzling din of central Bangkok will find their slice of paradise in Ari (Aree). This laid-back residential neighbourhood, just a few train stations from Sukhumvit, lies nestled in a rare brand of charm. Loved by the young and old alike for its cosy, urban community living, Ari is home to affluent Thais, government workers, expats and lots of families, some of them multi-generational residents. Strolling through its mellow mix of retro 70s-era houses, neoclassical-styled homes and low-rise condos with hydrangea-laden lush gardens, one is tempted to weigh the pros and cons of relocation. The tall-tree-and-vast-fields landscape of the past, now replaced by a one-odd New York-styled loft or a coconut-tree fringed beach bungalow, still has an inviting ‘smell-of-home’. For young urbanites and travellers yearning for a true taste of Bangkok life, this hip paradise is the place to be.

From the languid Siam spirit of its back alleys to the cheerful buzz of the main drag, Ari offers a whole range of gastronomic experiences for those willing to dive in. Authenticity spills over from the thriving line of street hawkers along Soi Ari. From Som Tam (green papaya salad), veggie dumplings and grilled bananas to Thai Hot Pot and fresh seafood to Khanom Beuang (mini-taco-shaped fried sweets) and Roti SaiMai (coloured sugar threads with unleavened bread), this is foodie heaven. 24x7.

Endless options for sit-downs lurk in every corner. Thai spicy curries







One of the many popular rooftop bars at Thonglor, Bangkok's cosmopolitan cultural hub

and coconut milk soups in grassy backyards, creamy crab pancakes in garage-bars, classic pizzas in co-working spaces or seafood platters off food trucks. Quirky roasteries or European-inspired cafes for easy conversations over pure Italian cocoa. Gin-based drinks inspired by Chinese tea or Japanese matcha green tea to the tune of soft jazz. And imported speciality liqueurs and signature cocktails by expert mixologists with live cover bands.

There's enough to occupy the freewheeler, from long shady

walks to lively fitness bouts and rejuvenating wellness sessions. Those on the lookout for retail therapy will find joy in browsing through the many tempting speciality stores. And the artsy at heart will lose track of time at contemporary art galleries, admiring high-resolution photography that celebrate Bangkok's urban lifestyle as well as historic Thai murals that preserve the country's rich heritage. Dipping into the pages of Ari's urban renewal success story can be rewarding...some

rubbed-off entrepreneurial passion and radical thinking perhaps? If not, at least the opportunity to recount the tale of sharing a food counter with a fashion model, bumping into a famous photographer, exchanging notes with a trailblazing artist or tete-a-tete with a 'just-made-it-big' restaurateur.

**THONGLOR IS TRENDING**

Grim Japanese military base, to unimaginative car dealership neighbourhood to playground for experimental establishments—the dramatic metamorphosis of Thonglor (Thong Lo) makes an intriguing case study in itself. And that is just one of the reasons to pin it to one's alternative agenda in Bangkok. Leftovers of the time-

**The artsy at heart will lose track of time at contemporary art galleries that celebrate Bangkok's urban lifestyle and rich heritage.**

ESSENTIALS	COUNTRY	LANGUAGE	CURRENCY	TEMPERATURE
	Thailand	Thai	Thai Baht	29°C (max), 25°C (min)



Insider's view

Nirmala Nair,  
IT (Operations)



“Even today, this vibrant capital city continues to outclass any other major city in the world with its aura of excitement and chaos. An all encompassing city, there is a lot more than just the ornate shrines, grand palaces and temples that define it. A detour from the busy street-life will take you on a sensory retreat to Bangkok’s colourful and busy flower market. While this may seem like a typical tourist attraction, the vibrant and aromatic flower market continues to appeal to every traveller.”



**Ari offers a range of exotic street food experiences from Som Tam (green papaya salad), veggie dumplings and grilled bananas, Thai Hot Pot, fresh seafood, Khanom Beuang (fried sweets) to Roti SaiMai (sweet bread).**

worn 30s survive in inexpensive ramen bars and traditional onsen bathhouses, pitching Thonglor as a place to soak up Japanese culture. Aptly nicknamed ‘Nihonmura’ (Japantown), yet one of the most cosmopolitan areas in the city, it still has a dense population of Japanese expats, apart from European families and upwardly mobile young Thais. But unlike Ari, Thonglor flaunts a more full-blooded and flamboyant persona.

The main artery, Sukhumvit Soi 55 is a baffling assemblage of sois side streets painted in colours of exuberance and abandon. Distractions are aplenty in the shape of snazzy restaurants, uber-

cool bars and even old-fashioned taverns, carved out of Bangkok’s most expensive real estate. Ultra-modern cooking techniques marry culinary genius...translating into utopia for the gastrophile. One can find the best of cuisine within these few square miles from sushi to mole and green tomatillo enchilada, paella with truffle cheese and monkfish cheek and New York-style cheesecake.

From food to other finer things in life. The craft-inclined can find workshops on leather-making, silk-weaving, terrarium making or organic scrubs. Aspiring artists can let cocktails and creative juices flow at the Paint Bar. Or hang out with





A *klong* (wooden boat) cruises leisurely through the Saem Canal in Bangkok



Vistara has daily  
non-stop flights  
between Bangkok  
and Delhi.

like-minded strangers at Thonglor Art Space, a venue for a variety of performing arts, including plays and art exhibitions. Movie-lovers can indulge in screenings of indie and art films in a luxe, wood-panelled cinema. Music fans can spend hours at a popular vinyl music store to discover new bands and re-visit old favourites. Remote workers can fulfill their wildest dreams inside four floors of the largest co-working space in Asia, complete with rooftop bar,

cafe lounge, outdoor terrace and a spa. Shopaholics can head to Siam Square for a field day in and out of stores, cafes and salons or dig through vintage treasures in the maze of Thonglor Art Village. As for the rest, there are poetry slams, live music, and much more. And to step back into time, a highly recommended retreat awaits in the peace of the Saem Canal on a creaky wooden *klong* (boat). Cruising unhurriedly through the ‘Venice of the East’

is a guiltless pleasure, which the slow traveller will especially savour. Eavesdropping on the friendly chatter of wok cooks and noodle vendors while drooling over khanom krok (coconut griddle cakes), one realises how conspicuous and captivating Bangkok’s split personality can be. Blink-and-miss...considering the infamous Thai trend for trends, who knows what this ephemeral *avatar* of Bangkok will mutate into tomorrow? ✨

## Local INSIGHTS



### VINTAGE CAR EXHIBITION

Every year in June, Bangkok hosts a Vintage Car Exhibition where over a hundred classic cars are displayed. Held at the Future Park shopping centre, this exhibition focuses on cars of historical and aesthetic importance. Though most are original vehicles, some replicas and specially invented cars using old engines are also showcased.