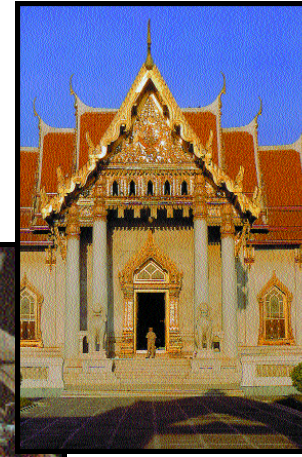


THE TREASURE OF THE ORIENT

BANGKOK



FACTS ABOUT BANGKOK

Population: 7.5 million
 Area: 1,569 sq km (612 sq mi)
 Languages: Thai, English
 Religion: Buddhism, Muslim, Christianity, Hinduism
 Currency: baht (B)
 1US\$ = 37.4 baht

Before becoming Thailand's capital in 1782, Bang Makok or "Place of Olives" (now Bangkok) was an outlying district of Thonburi, a town founded as a trading post in the mid-16th century. Due to its proximity to Siam's capital, Ayuthaya, the town also developed military significance. In the 18th century, a fortress was built on the banks of the Chao Phraya and a great iron chain hung across the river to block unwelcome arrivals.

The long-running Chakri Dynasty was founded in the late 18th century. Shortly after, in 1782, King Rama I moved the capital to Bangkok on the other side of the river, believing it was an easier location to defend.

Using thousands of Khmer prisoners of war, city walls were built, the canal system was expanded, and new temples were erected by artisans from Ayuthaya. When the construction of the new capital was finished in 1785, it was given a new name: a tongue-twister comprising 164 letters which referred modestly to divine gems, unconquerable lands and divine

shelters.

The name was mercifully shortened to Krung Thep (City of Angels), but the city is still known by its old Bangkok moniker to most of the outside world.

The first half of the 19th century in Bangkok saw a frenzy of temple building under the rule of Rama III, while the definitive moment of his successor's turn at the throne was the construction of the city's first road alongside the river in 1861.

More roads were soon added and well before the turn of the century, horse-drawn carriages and rickshaws had replaced watercraft as the favoured mode of urban travel.

The city kept growing in all directions in the first decades of the 20th century and numerous roadways were added to carry the new motorised forms of transport. In 1932 Thailand established a constitutional government and Bangkok became the hub of a vast but still expanding public service.

In WWII the Japanese briefly occupied parts of the city and following the war

Bangkok quickened its pace towards modernisation. From the mid-1960s the city became a favourite "rest and recreation" spot for foreign troops involved in the Vietnam conflict and the sex trade continues to this day in the form of various nightclubs and massage parlours. After riding a double-digit economic boom through the 1980s, Bangkok was hit hard by the economic crisis that swept Asia in 1997 - a crisis that came with warning signs which few local and international observers chose to acknowledge.

The negative effects of this large-scale economic setback are now ebbing away, however. Today Bangkok can be found reprising its role as the financial hub of mainland South-East Asia, luring a mixture of Asian and Western investors. The city continues to expand and the vibrancy of its entrepreneurial, carnal and spiritual streets continues to attract hordes of visitors.

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