

# BANG

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stories



Lena Urbańska  
Bangkok Stories

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# HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THIS E-BOOK

What you'll find in this guide:

- \* 65 of our favorite Bangkok spots
- \* Split up into districts:

## **OUR NEIGHBORHOOD**

## **OLD TOWN**

## **OTHER DISTRICTS WE LOVE**

## **DAY TRIPS/EXCURSIONS**

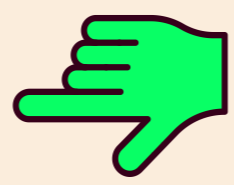
## **EXTRAS**

- \* The chapters are color-coded to help you navigate this guide.
- \* The bottom right-hand corner of each page lets you know where you are at all times.
- \* Each location is linked directly to its Google Maps page – simply click on the name to be redirected.





# amass coffee and art toys



[link to Google Maps](#)

An unusual combination of coffee shop featuring...  
figures). For instance, the "Molly" doll, with her  
(a major Chinese brand known for its collectible  
a selection of toys from the Pop Mart collection  
characteristic oversized eyes, was created by Hong  
Kong artist KennysWork. She has since become one  
of the most famous figures in pop culture today.



[link to the webpage / IG profile](#)

A miniature of the girl in various "situations"  
and outfits can cost from a dozen to several thou-  
sand euros. And yes, we're only talking about a  
doll the size of a 3-year-old child. But there's no  
shortage of enthralled collectors who are willing  
to pay a pretty penny for one.



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the table of contents](#)



[our neighborhood coffee](#)



# INTRO

The first lesson of Bangkok is getting a sense of perspective – letting go of any judgment and knowing how to take things in stride, with a wink and a smile.

Every weekend, we'd head to the same cafe – not specifically for the caffeine hit, but for the smashing conversations with Mr. Pumpui, who happens to love Bangkok like nobody else.

Every morning, we'd count the lizards sunning themselves right outside our window. We'd visit the temples quite late in the day, so that we'd have a chance to linger on our own just before closing time. On the way, we'd get a grilled banana and a chilled coconut drink. We'd get stuck in steaming traffic jams, sweating buckets while we waited. We spent hours in local restaurants and sometimes we'd end up moving our table out of the way of a driver parking their car right where we were having dinner. We took boats down the canals, which can transport you pretty much anywhere you'd like to go. We'd freeze our butts off in the air-conditioned wagons of trains, admiring all the different people coming in from

all over the world – and their cool outfits. We'd ride around the city after dark, feeling like players in a video game, slipping through alleyways and shortcuts, slicing through traffic. Two levels of concrete snakes hovering above us, as if they wanted to take over the city, as we rode over bridges and streets all the way to the other end of the city, just for kicks. For us, Bangkok felt like one big electrifying entity. As if we'd discarded our masks of maturity and decorum, letting ourselves be kids again. We learned what it really means to live on our own terms.

We soaked in the chill vibes, embraced all the smiles we were offered, because glee just comes with the territory. We learned to be respectful, even when we already thought we'd had it down pat. We opened ourselves up to everything that seemed new and unfamiliar. We embraced everything Bangkok had to offer us every single day. The best food? Lightness of heart? Spontaneity? Energy? Courage? Perspective? All the above, but also the freedom and awareness that things can always be done differently.

I could see that here, people are respected and embraced for who they are. A lot of people would tell me that they felt that they could be themselves in Bangkok and that they finally understood what that meant to them. I used to think that people who moved here for good did it because it was more affordable than other places. And while this is true, there's more to it. There's an ease about Bangkok that sets it apart from everywhere else.



Thailand is like a Swedish buffet that's open for everybody to just pick and choose bits and pieces of what they like. You can go wild, try something new and it's all there for you to try. It's a bit like an all-inclusive vacation, but here things tend to work out on their own, without the need for an agent or concierge. It just flows and comes together. Want to rent a scooter? You can get it booked in ten minutes flat, paying a few dollars for a whole day of zipping around. Want to visit one of the nearby islands? There's plenty of planes, trains, buses, cars and taxis that will take you there in no time. Suddenly craving a bite to eat? You can have anything you like and at absolutely any hour of day or night. Thailand is so specialized when it comes to tourism and service, so it feels like almost anything is possible. This easy-going city has a big "can-do" culture and there's really not much room for "cannot-do." And you don't see much disagreement or arguing either.

## **Buddhist Capitalism in a nutshell.**

At some point, we ended up staying in Bangkok for a three-month stretch and it ended up being one of the most fascinating trips we'd ever taken, even though we were in the same place the whole time. We learned so much about Thailand, way more than we'd ever found out over ten years of traveling here. We had ample time to delve into the city and understand it better. We took this opportunity to slow down, take a look around, listen and

have conversations. And we were talking about the best sites to see or islands to visit, we were getting into the stuff of everyday life, like we were local kids at the playground. We soaked up the culture and got to know it beyond its temples and fragrant kitchens. This trip opened up our hearts, minds and palates, changing our tastes, and even how we saw our plans for the future. It made us more courageous. I'm compelled to tell everyone I know, "If you don't know what to do with yourself, go to Bangkok, it will change the way you think."

These stories are about what I enjoyed and what I adored. What fascinated me the most. That's why you're not going to find any critiques of the government. No essays on poverty or the troubles everyday people face on a daily basis, no complaints about the smog or the dusky tones of a polluted sky.

These "Bangkok Stories" are focused on the people and places that make up this incredible city, woven together as our very personal collection of details and impressions.

We made this guide to share our love for Bangkok with you!

Lena and Spider aka RAZEMTANIEJ ✨







# WHERE TO SLEEP



Three proposals just for you: a studio, a hostel or an apartment. All of them located in „our neighborhood.” Finding the perfect place to wake up to is key to having a good trip. Wake up to all the coolest coffee joints within walking distance and then let the streets lead you through the fascinating labyrinth of the city. Explore the markets and bazaars, shop for souvenirs, have a drink at one of the countless bars. And when you come home after all your meandering, completely exhausted, this is your home away from home, where you can relax and recharge before embarking on the next day’s adventures. ✨





## ba hao apartments

The tiny street of Soi Nana is famous for its stretch of bars. Right at the top (or the bottom, depending on where you're coming from) you'll spot a three-storey building on the corner, boasting dim red lighting, neon signs and a large terrace on the last floor. The whole thing looks like a local movie set in China and it's impossible to fight the temptation to enter.

A terrazzo bar and Chinese porcelain at the entrance. We'll come back to the menu as Ba Hao is also mentioned in our food recommendations. We ate and drank here more than once, but it wasn't until later that we discovered the Ba Hao Residence, two loft apartments for rent.







We looked down at the lush terrace overgrown with flowers and pondered what it would be like to live here. At last, we got the chance to book the Santihap apartment and all I can say is... it's perfection. Every single thing about it is wonderful, from the giant window in the middle of the room, offering a living landscape of the city with its golden temple and sparkling skyscrapers in the background. It greets you as you're walking in and when you're going off to bed, you can look out of this window even as you take a shower. And every time, the scene you see in front of you is different. And there's the terrace I mentioned, overlooking a tiny, but lively little street full of bar hoppers and truck drivers diligently packing up their wares before driving off to China.

Peace, quiet, comfort, a fine sound system and bright natural lighting. There's also a common area shared by all four guests staying at the house, where you can enjoy a tasty traditional breakfast prepared by the caretaker. Her attention to detail is yet another treasured boon of this place. Ideal for chilling with a coffee on one of the leather couches and fantasizing about staying here for good. ✨





**baba  
mama**

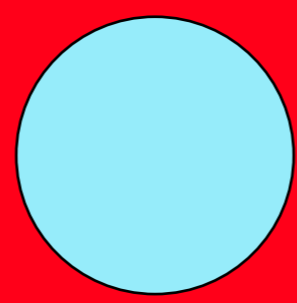
Two drooling dogs are perched outside, approaching you as you try to pass by. You look around for their owner, who's usually nowhere in sight, and then just start petting them. You might think they've been trained to get your attention, but really all they want is a cuddle and even a snack perhaps. The owner will open the door eventually and you might feel perplexed, unsure whether it's a cafe, an old Chinese pharmacy or just somebody's private living room. Right in the middle, seated in front of the big TV screen, the owner's mother presides, usually watching a film or catching up on the accounting. Some days, the owner's son is out there showing off his gaming skills. A true family business indeed.



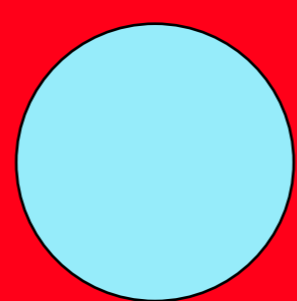
Most importantly, this spot serves very good coffee in a cozy atmosphere. That said, no one is in a hurry and each coffee is prepared with care and patience, so you might have to wait a couple of minutes. We recommend the classic drip, which gives you a powerful jolt with each sip.

If you prefer your coffee cold, you'll find something really special here: the iced Americano with fresh orange juice, excuse me, tangerine juice. You'll start to wonder if someone accidentally smuggled a spoonful of sugar, but the citrusy sweetness is all natural. In tandem with the bitterness of the coffee, it makes for a perfect party in your mouth. Even the staff from Supha (another local cafe) come here to indulge in this BABA MAMA specialty. ✨





# THAI SIN THONBURI





## duck noodle house



The ducks hanging in the doorway are as eye-catching as the boss of this spot, seated in her swivel chair, a perm in her hair, her eyes lined in black, her hands all covered in gleaming rings you can see from afar. She's always snacking on something, scolding her staff and counting the money tucked away in her desk drawer.

The fragrant broth served up here will warm your belly, even on the hottest days and it always tastes great. Ideal for breakfast or lunch. There's a choice of 5 types of homemade noodles, duck or goose and giblets (for the most daring diners). All served with a generous ladle of broth or stir-fried.



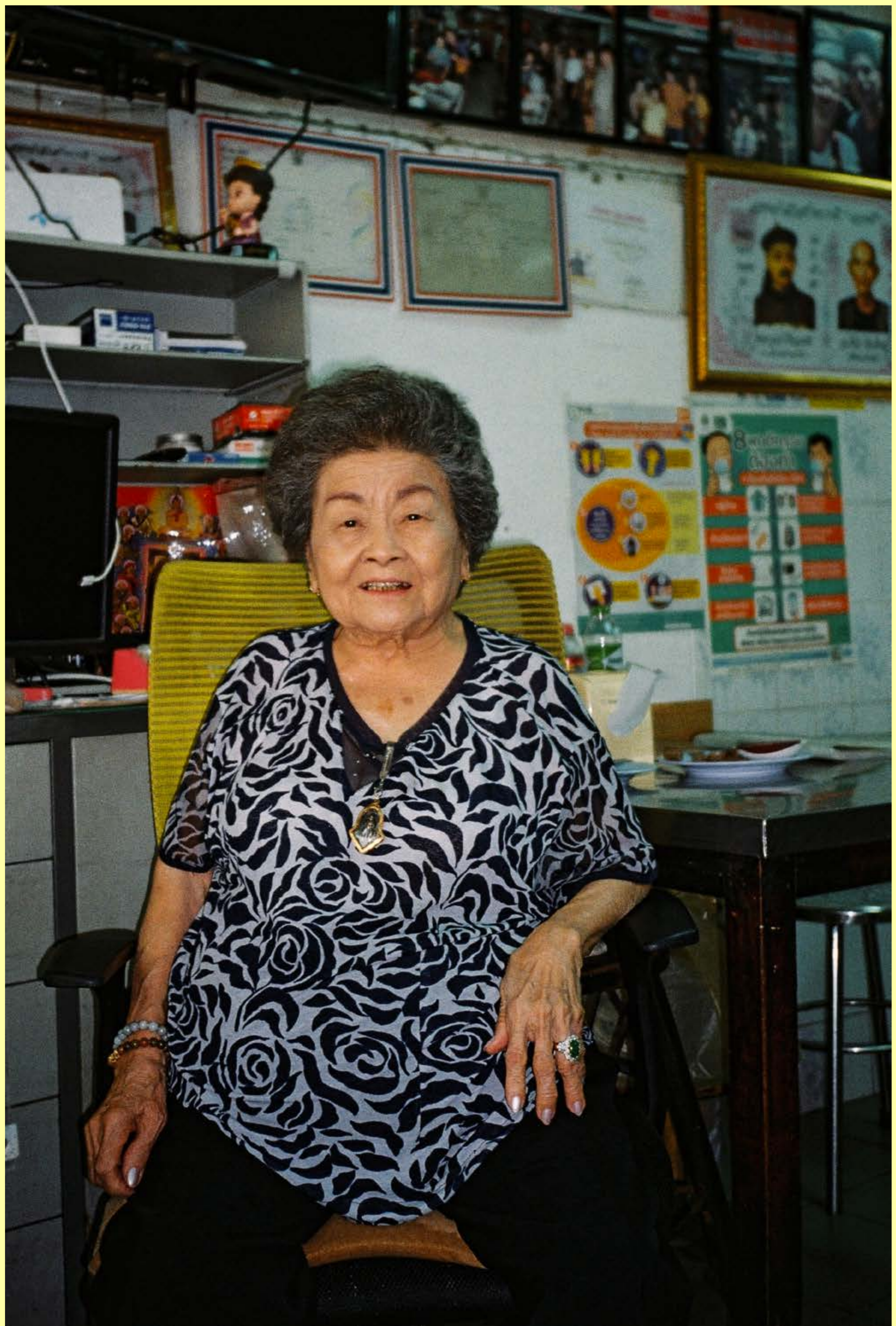
I ask her: “How long have you been serving your signature duck dishes?”

“My restaurant is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year and I am about to celebrate my 90th birthday. I opened my business later in life, at the age of 40, when my children were all grown up. Nobody in my family had ever run a restaurant. That’s when I moved to the Talad Noi district, where the famous and much-loved soup - yen ta fo - was sold everywhere. Yen ta fo is Thai pink noodle soup, which owes its color to fermented soybean paste. I tried each and every soup, one by one, and then I dared to open my own shop. It wasn’t the same dish, it was my own vision. I started with fried duck noodles. I focused on the quality of the products, made thousands of attempts and finally created my own recipe. I quickly became successful because I had no competition over here and the dish is excellent.”

“We have been eating in your restaurant for years, it is always full, loved by locals and tourists. Have you ever thought of opening a second restaurant?”

“I like to have everything under control, my restaurant came about in our house. It’s quite a popular model here, you live upstairs and work downstairs, so you can keep an eye on everything. I prepared every single dish myself until 2020, I cooked here for 47 years. I worked almost every day and instead of being tired, I owe it to my work that I feel so good today. How fit and active







I am at the age of 90. I've never thought about a second place. I couldn't be in two places at once!

“How about a franchise?”

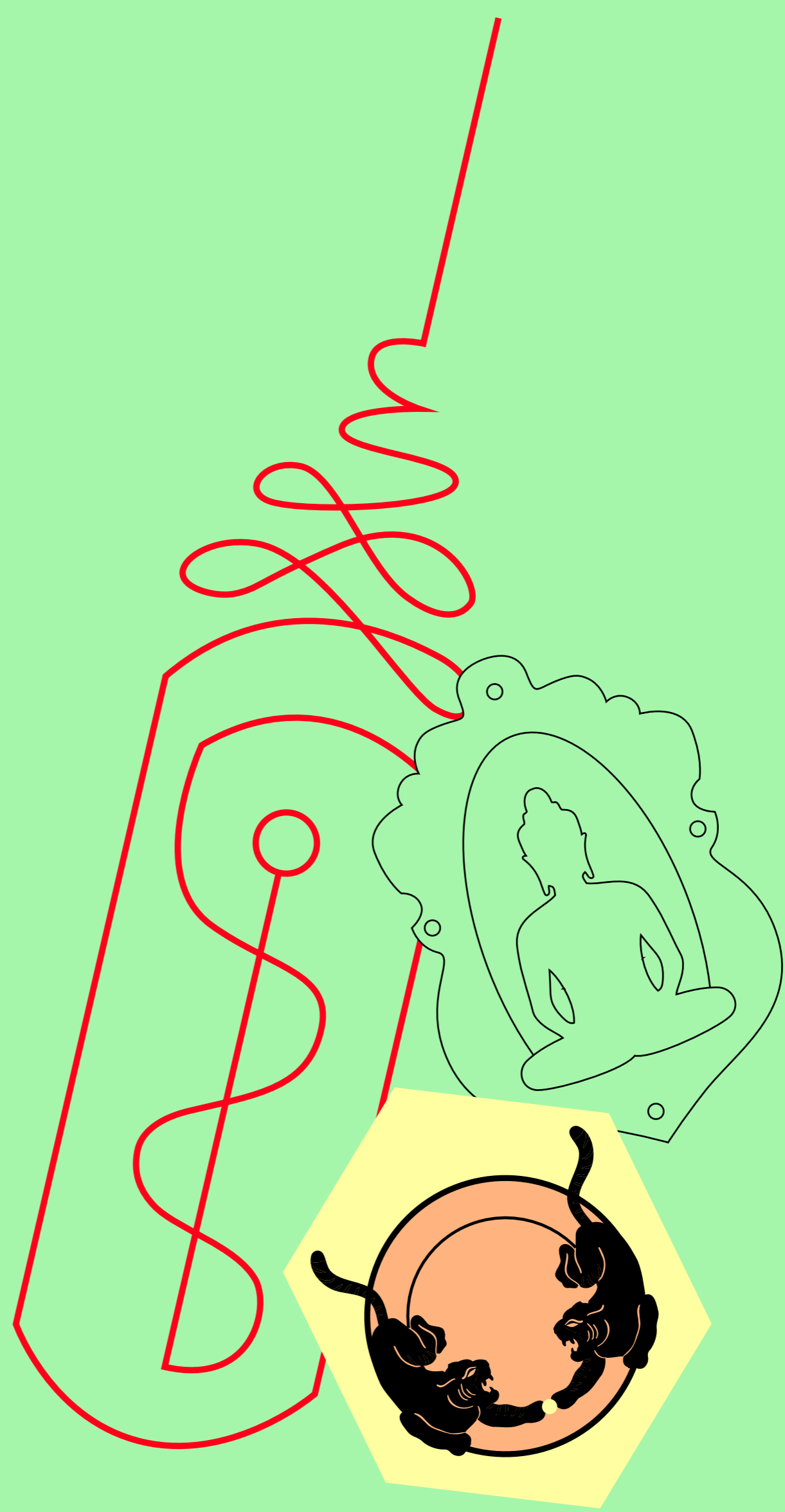
“Oh no, then my customers would go elsewhere instead of coming to me! Now, they come to me from all over the city. Even the ones who moved to the other side of Bangkok. In Thailand, we are loyal to what we like, we get attached to certain places and just keep coming back.”

At the end of our conversation, the boss treated us to the best delicacy of all – duck neck to nibble on.. Thankfully, Spider was there to save me, gobbling up all of the meaty delicacies with a smile on his face.

Definitely try it. Open until 3:00 PM every day. ✨



# WHAT TO SEE WHAT TO DO



So where do locals stock up daily on traditional ingredients and specialities for their own kitchens? Where do Thais seek happiness and contemplate power? Is a temple a place of worship or more of an educational center? What's hiding behind the curtains of the massage parlors? What's the story behind Thai medicine, a tradition as old as China's?

You'll find art galleries, coworking spaces, an interactive museum with plastic bags on display. Bookstores for connoisseurs and an ever-buzzing flower market open 24/7. If I had to say which of these attractions is a must-see, I'd say check them all out. This section is basically an introductory course in Thai culture. ✨





## amulet market

They say 70% of Thais carry at least one amulet with them at all times. Some have thousands. Amulets and superstition are at the core of Thai culture. I can't help but stare at the chests of men who proudly wear a whole collection of their ornaments around their necks. Hanging on a single chain, perfectly symmetrical and framed in glass, they hang like a painting, but worn on the chest. It is said that the faithful like to wear more than one of them, since their collective powers are multiplied and magnified.

To call them talismans or good luck charms doesn't quite explain their function. They are meant to protect against potential dangers and ills, to



attract everything from a good financial streak to a new match. Each amulet has a purpose and an inscription that states exactly what it is for. You name the need and the right amulet will make itself known.

Amulet Market in Bangkok is one of the largest of its kind in Southeast Asia. You'll find hundreds, thousands, endless amounts there. Different sizes, forms and functions. They are usually made of plaster, bone, wood or metal. Most are mass-produced and cost just a few cents. They are usually bought at Buddhist temples, as a souvenir and to support the temple complex. They may be handmade at a sacred site and/or blessed by a monk. They may contain relics, such as the ashes of a burnt sacred text, the hair of a famous monk or the particles of a temple ruin. All these extras magnify the power of the amulet and raise its value.

The market stretches along the river, where you can take a boat, have a bite to eat on site and watch the amulet seekers with their magnifying glasses looking for clues to the hidden meanings embedded in the talisman. At the fortune-teller's market, you can even seek out what the future holds. ✨



## EXTRAS

## ความพิเศษ

ความพิเศษ

Extras – in other words, some of my favorite places that happen to be scattered around the city. And also extra-special in terms of the unique experience too. Even the shyest person out there won't be able to stop from bopping along to a drag show performed by a stiletto-heeled cast of queens. Survey the city from an observation deck on the 79th floor, which turns into a disco at night. Take a walk in a park that also doubles as a Chinese cemetery, where the living play basketball or lift weights in the gym. Visit the Wat Arun temple, which is gorgeous inside and out – and where you can play the part of a Thai princess or prince for an afternoon. There's also the city's biggest food bazaar, a titillating fashion shop and a modern park with stunning views of the sparkling skyline. ✨





## house of heals drag queen show

Yes, I was already well aware of the popularity of drag shows in Bangkok. There are at least five clubs here where you can see a top-notch stage show almost every day. Plus there are plenty of reality shows centered around drag queen performances on Thai television. So, yes, accepting and celebrating transgender identity is an everyday thing in Thailand.

House of Heals is a club owned by Pangina Heals, an undisputed star of the drag scene. Thanks to her TV shows, where she has appeared in the guise of Lady Gaga or Mariah Carey, Pangina is not only famous on the local scene – her fame has spread to Asia, the UK and the US. Underneath the flawless make-up, the wigs, sequined costumes, push-



up bras, corsets and 10 cm stilettos, we have a charming young man named Mr Pan Pan Narkprasert.

The club is on the 33rd floor of an exclusive hotel. Just as the lift doors open, you're greeted by an impossibly oversized shoe with a sky-high heel. There's a lot going on right off the bat: neon lights, feathers, panthers, diamond bras.

Mr Pan Pan greeted us at the door, explaining he would be our usher that evening. In impeccable English, he announces the theme of that night's show and divulges that Beyoncé is actually headlining – all six Beyoncés in a row, that is. As a warm-up, the audience gets to answer questions about which album each particular song is from. As a reward for giving the correct answer – and for shouting it out louder than the rest – the winner is given “dick shots” to down, as the rest of the audience cheers them on.

Pan Pan shoots a series of jokes and comments so funny that we're crying with laughter. Then Beyoncé begins to move gracefully around the dance floor, imitating her in a variety of outfits and songs. And each of them is better than one before. I was so tempted to get closer to make sure wasn't actually the real Queen B!

Perfect lip-syncing, spectacularly choreographed movements. Every split in the air landed immaculately. The air is filled with excitement, jokes, fun, screams and ovations that I burst out in laughter and in tears – all at the same time.







During the intermission, audience members are invited on stage to try their hand at pole dancing. I couldn't possibly resist the opportunity, so I jump on the platform to join them. Casting my shoes off and getting into the groove until it's time to watch the second half of the show. Boy, are we in for a treat! A performance by all six Beyoncés at once, of all body types and all dressed in skin-tight denim shorts. They sweep across the stage singing "Crazy in Love." and energizing the audience. I haven't felt so much energy and freedom in a while and I don't want the show to end.

Afterward, I did some more research on Ms Pangina Heals. Reading the interviews, I couldn't help wishing I had asked for one myself. Mr Pan Pan talks about how he got to the top, about how he feels he is "a magician who enchants people with the illusion of femininity." In another interview, he shares a very powerful and moving statement:

"Listen more. Celebrate your individuality, your own beauty, and understand other people's differences. Never apologize for who you are and who you love, because if you start with "I'm sorry" you imply that you are doing something wrong [11]. ✨





**ok, bye.**