

#TRAVEL

# BANGKOK, PHUKET, CHIANG MAI

## The ultimate kid-friendly Thai destinations

My travelogue has had a recent makeover. The itinerary now insists on including clean bathrooms, feeding areas, and a prospective diaper change station. Even though these recent life developments had me apprehensive to venture back out into the world, I slowly started to identify and appreciate how family-friendly most cities in the world had become when I was not paying attention.

It was a bit like that car spotting phenomenon. You know the one where, when you notice a particular brand and model of a car, they start to appear everywhere. Similarly, once I braved back out into the world, I started to realise how much the world had to offer to travelling parents with children. It's still a work-in-progress, but at least it was much better than what my fears had me convinced.



As the first international travel location, my personal preference was to start with a place that was already familiar. I could not look past Thailand.

On a global scale, when you do the math for budget, accommodation, food and shopping and build a travel itinerary, I think anyone in any stage in life would find it hard pressed to find a better alternative to Thailand. When you add children to the mix, it becomes even more appealing.

Firstly, let's tackle where to go in Thailand. Bangkok or one of the islands, or both?

I would recommend Bangkok as the first stop to ease into the holiday season with modern facilities and an endless supply of 7-Elevens for any need at any hour of the day. A couple of days to get your bearings before you shoot off to your island holiday.

Although any number of island combinations could work as your first holiday, my recommendation includes two options. One for families with really young children and zero energy to plan or think. Another option for families on the path to recovery is some off the off-the-beaten-track adventures. Let's go!

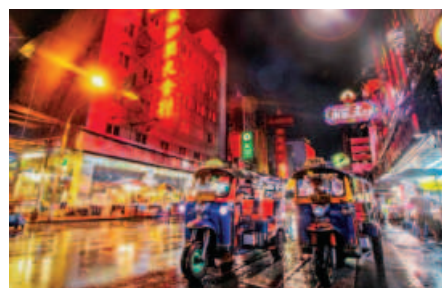
### BKK + Phuket

Let's face it, Bangkok has a reputation. If a certain portrayal in the Hangover movie is to be believed, what would have been its entertaining and exciting prospect pre-children would now terrorise the same adults and make them want to stay away. In my opinion, though, the movie underestimates Bangkok's diversity and



capability to segregate trouble and keep it tied to specific locations only.

Most of this city actually offers a safe passage to most on a quick stopover, as also indicated by female solo travellers, marking it as one of the safer cities that can be enjoyed on your own. I place tremendous value on female and marginalised lenses on travel, especially when it comes to safety. With that in mind, let's scope out the general must-sees!



Wherever you start in Bangkok, and I do hope you can find a suitable accommodation as close to the Nana MRT as possible, as most attractions pan out from that area. I would start my day by purchasing an MRT ticket, get off at Asok and make my way to Terminal 21, a more spread-out shopping mall.

The various exits also offer additional walking time while staying within air-conditioned zones, an important requirement on your first day, to acclimatise. The food options inside the mall are also varied and include some of the best hygienic dessert options. If you are like me and cannot walk inside a mall without some kind of bubble, boba or sago drink in hand, then look no further and head straight to YenlyYours in Terminal 21. This is an absolute mango heaven! Besides its smoothies and floats, the dessert options include mango sticky rice, of course, but also the lesser-promoted "treasures" such as mango mochi, mango cheese tart, and

mango crepe.

Once you have checked mango off your list, move on to Pier 21 for a pad Thai with prawn wrapped in egg.

If you are a pram-pushing daredevil, by all means tick off the mandatory locations such as Khao San Road, the Floating Market and Arab Street; all the more power to you! However, if you would like to play it safe on your first trip while continuing to partake in the best of the city, I would suggest an alternate route to old BKK.

Rattanakosin is the historic heart of Bangkok. Most people associate it with all the Wats or temples it has to offer, but for me, this is where the real hidden charm of Bangkok lies, like the old parts of most cities, I suppose, being the source of origin. Have you really seen Dhaka until you have visited Old Dhaka? The bank of the Chao Phraya is magical, and the cafes and restaurants lining this part of the city are unforgettable. Each restaurant has a history and old photographs you can peruse while you eat.

A full day spent in this part of Bangkok, traversing between the many Wats, ferried across in one of the canal boats and ending the day, watching the sunset from the Eagle Nest rooftop, can easily make one forget about the chaos of the city centre.

Once you and your baby have recovered from the flight, it's time for island hopping!

### Phuket

I chose Phuket because, whilst there are plenty of other secluded islands that can offer an experience a thousand times better than here, it is the sheer convenience of Phuket that I find unmatched. Here, you don't have to forego the natural beauty to satisfy comfort.

Nearly all resorts are built to attract families with children. You can choose any number of resorts along that coastline, whether it be Centara, Marriott, or Holiday Inn, suiting your budget; you are guaranteed a world within a world. With

a variety of children's activities offered through the kids' clubs, several splash pools and most restaurants catering to children, some offering freshly prepared meals specific to toddlers, whilst tired mummies are whisked away for the perfect foot massage or backrub next to the ocean, this is the family holiday we all deserve.

Whilst I have been busy blowing Phuket's horn, the memory of another island begs to be mentioned. This is Koh Lanta, where I had once disappeared to during a challenging work assignment and had left after a couple of days feeling like a new person. This island feels like being cradled into nature's arms like no other, ushering in peace, tranquillity and safety. Please look it up if that's the need of the hour. Otherwise, the newly reenergised army of parents, look this way with your slightly older kids, for an adventure away to Chiang Mai!

### Chiang Mai

Head to the Elephant Parade with your kiddy entourage and learn the story about the father and son duo, who brought this place into existence when they fell in love with a certain baby elephant called Mosha during their holiday in Thailand.

Have you heard of cocoon farms, no? Then your next stop should be to the Thai Silk Village for a hands-on workshop on silk weaving.

A visit to Chiang Mai is not complete without at least a day spent at Baan Kang Wat, a tucked away art village, yes, guilty as charged — also in the Old Town streets of Chiang Mai.

Every inch of this place is Instagram-worthy and one of the best family day outs you can have. While the kiddos can enjoy a painting workshop, you can take your tired feet across for a cup of joe and a slice of cake at Graph. If you happen to peek inside one of the art studios, coffee in hand, some of the artists might let you watch as they work.

If you are anything like me, an out-and-out urban parent, Chiang Mai also offers a wonderful opportunity at glamping! You have heard me right, this is the newest stage in your camping journey, for those who are taken by the idea without being equipped with the logistics (and let's face it, the guts!) that camping demands.

Once you have had your fair share of café hopping, night markets and kayaking adventures, you might want to end your trip by taking a stroll to the Thapae Gate of the Old City Walls to take to the shores of the Ping River to watch thousands of people release their krathongs or paper-based lanterns into the water. Alternatively, arrange for a day-trip to Nong Bua Pra Chao Luang lotus lake to watch thousands do the same, but in this case, releasing the lanterns into the sky, and totally for free!

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**Photo: Collected**