

# A FAR

TRAVELERS WHO CARE

A.FAR.COM

WINTER 2023

# Where to Go in 2023

THE PLACES ISSUE

p. 31

Graz, AUSTRIA  
Sharjah, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES  
Bangkok, THAILAND  
Brescia & Bergamo, ITALY  
Cambutal, PANAMA  
The Great Lakes, UNITED STATES  
Tasmania, AUSTRALIA  
Prince Edward Island, CANADA  
Salvador, BRAZIL  
Transylvania, ROMANIA  
Ruaha National Park, TANZANIA  
Baltimore, UNITED STATES



## How to get there

There are no nonstop flights from the United States, but Air Canada launched seasonal service from Vancouver to Bangkok on December 1—the first direct route from North America in a decade.

## Where to stay

The Standard, Bangkok Mahanakorn hotel opened in late July with saturated, curvaceous decor and a well-curated concept shop.

**Ambitious young Thais are driving a creative reawakening in one of the world's most visited cities.**

by KATHRYN ROMEYN



FROM THE END OF an L-shaped bar I watched three chefs in black caps delicately plate 11 dishes of what appeared to be snow. Loud music masked the sounds of the busy Bangkok street outside. "OK guys, this one is titled, 'Daft Punk Is Playing in My Mouth,'" said chef Sareen Rojanametin, setting the intriguing dish before me. Marvelously on cue, the throbbing LCD Soundsystem song "Daft Punk Is Playing at My House" burst onto the stereo.

The first bite rocked me to my core. At Small Dinner Club, which "pulls apart, questions, and reimagines Thai food," you're not handed a menu. The 12-course evenings are a delightful mystery accompanied by inspiration notes from the 32-year-old chef, who opened the hidden boîte in February 2022. "For me this dish represents the essence of Thai cuisine," he wrote. I expected coconut or lime; instead I got an explosion of Thai green chile. My eyebrows started sweating. I swirled it all up: hot ice, tiny iridescent fish, watermelon, and a sumptuous black sesame sauce. These were the flavors of Thailand composed into an entirely new song. Rojanametin, who spent two years in a forest monastery before opening the restaurant, tells me, "The city has changed a lot in the last four years. People are much more daring."

Surprise is a theme that came up again and again on my latest trip to Bangkok. Before the pandemic, this was the world's most visited city, known for its floating markets and ornate temples. Now it's in the midst of a renaissance, thanks to the creativity of young Thais





COURTESY THE STANDARD, BANGKOK MAHANAKHON (LEFT).  
COURTESY TOURISM AUTHORITY OF THAILAND (RIGHT)

like Rojanametin. A crop of ambitious entrepreneurs, energized by cultural and ancestral pride, are dreaming up galleries and cafés, soulful restaurants, and fun theme bars. "It's amazing to be in Bangkok at the moment," Rojanametin says. "The scene is working, the culture is working, and people are into it."

I caught glimpses of the thronged Chao Phraya River while weaving through the historic neighborhoods of Bangrak-Klongsan (recently dubbed Bangkok's creative district) and Talad Noi. Local guides from the luxury travel company Smiling Albino bring tourists here on cycling tours, but it's mostly Bangkok kids who've discovered the rich Instagram photo ops. One *soi*, or small laneway, doubles as an alfresco gallery with murals of fantastical Thai and Chinese characters

streaming down one wall, 49 gritty images shot on film by local photographers on the opposite one. Food vendors and jewelry traders embedded for generations work alongside a new cohort opening spots such as Hong Sieng Kong, an antique-filled café in a 150-year-old riverside warehouse with brick walls choked by a fig tree.

Mook Attakanwong, whose parents' Lek Gallery has been a Bangrak fixture for more than 45 years, opened ATT 19, a multidisciplinary art hub, in February 2019. The family affair includes her sister, Cher, who runs the adjoining 12-seat kaiseki restaurant Mad Beef, and their mom, who makes cakes for ATT 19's café. Mook, 31, worked in the fashion industry in New York City before coming back

^  
*Bangkok's khlongs, or canals, snake around Buddhist temples, markets, and schools.*

<  
*Minimalist uniforms at the Standard, Bangkok Mahanakhon hotel were designed by local label Fah Chak WO+MAN.*

## BANGKOK

### Required eating

*Kuay teow reua*, or boat noodles, are made with Thai basil, morning glory, and chile simmered in a *tom yum* soup base.

### Stay longer

Hop a long-tail boat to Bang Krachao, aka the Green Lung of Bangkok, an island rich in farmland, jungle, and forest. Explore by bike and make a night of it by booking a villa at wellness retreat RAKxa.

## WHERE TO GO

2023

### Nickname

Bangkok's complete Thai moniker is Krung Thep Mahanakhon Amon Rattanakosin Mahinthara Ayuthaya Mahadilok Phop Noppharat Ratchathani Burirom Udomratchaniwet Mahasathan Amon Piman Awatan Sathit Sakkathattiya Witsanukam Prasit.





*"I want my sons to be proud of the land, proud of Bangkok, proud of Thailand, so cooking the traditional food is really important."*

rewilded lychee garden that has been in her family since before King Rama V's reign (1868–1910).

While Tiensup worked to save the land and the surrounding community she repeatedly called "precious" on our tour, her 31-year-old son, Andy Chotsrileocha, noticed his peers getting excited about sustainability and realized the best route to preserve their family heritage was through a revenue-generating business. Now, mother and son, along with staff hired from the neighborhood, welcome 500 people every weekend.

As I dug into Tiensup's tender *miang kham*—slow-roasted coconut and herbs stuffed into fresh coral tree leaves with slices of sour bilimbi—she opened a large book of maps. "I want my sons to be proud of the land, proud of Bangkok, proud of Thailand, so cooking the traditional food is really important—it connects everything," she said, eyes dancing. "Food can be a bridge between development, community, and history." *Poomjai*, it's worth noting, means proud.

I witnessed Bangkok's culinary scene thriving at every level. There are currently 30 Michelin-starred restaurants—R-Haan, Khao, and Yu Ting Yuan among them—with more surely coming, such as newcomer Potong, tucked inside chef-owner Pichaya (Pam) Utharntharm's traditional Chinese herbal medicine pharmacy. She serves a 20-course set menu of meditations on Thai Chinese flavors using local produce for dishes with names such as "beautiful" (blood clam, pomegranate, fermented chile, and lily kimchi).

Being temporarily cut off from the world wasn't the worst thing for the city. Attakanwong, the founder of ATT 19, noticed many Thai creatives who had been living abroad returned during the pandemic. "And," she said, "they're back for good," having discovered a new sense of purpose, urgency, and appreciation. "There's been a big exchange of knowledge, and a lot of seeking within ourselves, trying to fix the problems we see in the city."

*Kathryn Romeyn is a Bali-based journalist and devoted explorer of culture, nature, and design, especially throughout Asia and Africa.*



^  
The aromatic rice at Small Dinner Club is one in a parade of dishes from boundary-pushing chef Sareen Rojanametin.

COURTESY OF SMALL DINNER CLUB