

Bangkok's Playground: Khao San Road

The best things to do around Khao San Road

Khao San Road is the iconic heart of Bangkok for travelers. Described in Alex Garland's famous novel 'The Beach' as "the center of the backpacking universe", it's a frenetic mix of food stalls, shops, bars, clubs and ping pong shows. It's hard to visit Bangkok and not be drawn into the madness and fun!

We've thrown together a few tips to help you make the most out of this Bangkok institution.

Check out the shopping

If you've just arrived in Thailand then Khao San Road might be your first experience of local shopping. Brace yourself, it's going to be busy and hot! One of the best ways to get to know Khao San and the surrounding area is to take a wander around the shops and stalls.

You can buy everything here, from a towel with Donald Trump's face on it through to that travel charger you forgot at home. All the prices are negotiable so don't be afraid to haggle though, nothing's set in stone!

If you fancy a bigger market experience then head up the road to Banglamphu market, just a 5-minute walk away. The food here is famous so you can enjoy shopping and dinner all in one go.

Grab a traditional Thai massage

Forget the soothing whale sounds and gleaming salons, getting a traditional Thai massage on Khao San Road is a much more down to earth experience. These local masseuses are well trained in how to ease out all those knots in your muscles, but we can't promise it's always going to be a relaxing experience!

You haven't experienced a real massage until you've had a Thai grandmother digging her thumbs into the deepest recesses of your shoulder blades. Approach with caution if you're hungover, you're going to need all your strength stamina for this one!

Hit the bars on a pub crawl

No one does a pub crawl like Khao San does a pub crawl! Start with a few rounds of beer pong and some shots to get the party started, before heading out to the bars. Hit up Sukhumvit before carrying on to Khao San Road until the small hours!

There's no better way to check out the local clubs. It can get pretty heavy so make sure you have dinner before you start otherwise you might not make it to dawn. A friendly warning: don't plan any sightseeing the next morning, there's no point!

Enjoy Thai street food at its finest

Where do we start with the food in Thailand? Pad thai, kra prau, rotis, curries, it's all delicious. Khao San Road is a great place to check out some local delicacies and you can get a great, freshly cooked pad thai for 50 baht or less at the stalls than line the street.

Head for the stalls with the queues of locals, that way you know the food is fresh and tasty. If you're feeling brave then this is also the place to get the Instagram shot of you eating the infamous fried

insects on sticks. Of course eating locusts is all fun and games before you have to pick the legs out from between your teeth...

See the best sights in Bangkok

In a city that can feel pretty huge and overwhelming, Khao San Road is a great base to head out and see the sights. Its central location means you can walk to lots of the major sights like The Grand Palace and Wat Phra Kaew, the temples of Wat Pho and Wat Arun, and the Pak Khlong flower market.

If you find yourself tired and craving a cold beer at the end of a long day's sightseeing then it's always easy to jump in a tuktuk or a taxi to get back home to Khao San. Just make sure you agree the fare beforehand or ask the driver to use the meter, as scams are rife and overcharging is not uncommon.

Take a river cruise

Another good thing about Khao San Road? You're in walking distance of the river taxi stations on the Chao Phraya river, so you can hop on a boat and see the city from a different perspective.

It's super nice to leave the congestion and traffic behind and take to the water, although be warned, it isn't turquoise water like you see around the islands of the south. Bangkok isn't immune from the plastics problem you'll see elsewhere in Asia and there's a fair amount of rubbish floating around at the sides of the rivers and canals.

The real joy of a boat trip is seeing local life up close, however. Take a Blue Flag line river taxi which is specially for tourists, and explore the canals or 'klongs' around the Thonburi area for a hit of culture before party time starts again back on Khao San.

Get smarter at the National Museum

No, we're not really here for the museums either, but when the National Gallery is right next door and hosts some pretty cool exhibits then what's not to like? The Gallery is only a 10-minute walk from Khao San and is a beautiful building in its own right, before you even consider the cultural shows and rotating program of art and exhibits that pass through here every year.

And of course we should probably mention that it's air-conditioned, so it's a pleasant place to hang out!

The best thing to do on Khao San Road is...just be on Khao San Road!

We've saved the most entertaining Khao San Road activity until last- the people-watching. Yes, the number one thing you can do around here is grab a cold beer, pull up one of those iconic plastic stools and just sit back to enjoy the show.

Backpackers on their first big night out, longtime expats with young girls on their arms, ladyboys, ping pong show touts and a whole load of tourists getting drunk and happy together. Khao San Road at night is mayhem, and is a great place to be! Go join the fun!