

## SPORTS & ACTIVITIES

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# SPORTS & ACTIVITIES

Although the climate is not conducive to exercise, Bangkokians like to work up a sweat doing more than just climbing the stairs to the Skytrain station. All the popular Thai sports are represented in the capital city: from the top-tier *muay thai* (Thai boxing) to a pick-up game of *tákráw* (Siamese football).

Thais also consider traditional massage an integral component of health, so you can always pay someone else to do all the work. In tandem with the massage tradition, Bangkok is emerging as one of the world's spa capitals, with facilities to satisfy almost any whim or budget.

## HEALTH & FITNESS

Whether you're looking to sweat out the toxins or have them pampered away, Bangkok should be able to satisfy.

## SPAS & MASSAGE

According to traditional Thai healing, the use of herbs and massage should be part of a regular health and beauty regimen, not just an excuse for pampering. The variations on this theme range from storefront traditional Thai massage to an indulgent spa 'experience' with service and style. Bangkok's spas have begun to focus more on the medical than the sensory, and the growing number of plush resort-style spas offer a huge variety of treatments.

Although it sounds relaxing, traditional Thai massage (*núat phaen boraan*), will seem more closely related to *muay thai* than to shiatsu. It is based on yogic techniques for general health involving pulling, stretching, bending and manipulating pressure points. If done well, a traditional massage will leave you sore but revitalised.

Full-body massages will usually include camphor-scented balms or herbal compresses, or oil in cheaper establishments. Note that 'oil massage' is sometimes taken as code for 'sexy massage'; see the boxed text, **opposite**, for the lowdown. Sightseeing aches and pains can usually be treated effectively with a quick foot massage. Depending on the neighbourhood, prices for massages in small parlours are about 200B to 350B for a foot massage and 300B to 500B for a full-body massage. Spa experiences start at about 800B and climb like a Bangkok skyscraper. For a fuller idea of what's available see [www.spasinbangkok.com](http://www.spasinbangkok.com).

### BANYAN TREE SPA [Map p112](#)

☎ 0 2679 1052; [banyantreespa.com/bangkok](http://banyantreespa.com/bangkok); Banyan Tree Hotel & Spa, 21/100 Th Sathon Tai; packages from 5800B; 📍 Lumpini

This hotel spa delivers modern elegance and world-class pampering. The womb-like spa rooms look out over a silent and peaceful vision of Bangkok from on high. Thai, Swedish and Balinese massages, body scrubs using aromatic oils and herbs with medicinal properties, and beauty treatments comprise the spa's offerings. 'Spa vacation' packages include accommodation.

### BUATHIP THAI MASSAGE [Map pp118–19](#)

☎ 0 2251 2627; 4/13 Soi 5, Th Sukhumvit; 1hr massage 270B; 🕒 10am-midnight; 📍 Nana On a small sub-soi (lane) behind the Amari Boulevard Hotel, this tidy shopfront is in a decidedly sleazy part of town, but inside is a professional masseur whose focused concentration could melt metal.

### NAKORNTON THAI MEDICAL SPA

[Map pp124–5](#)  
☎ 0 2416 5454; [www.nakornthonhospital.com](http://www.nakornthonhospital.com); 12th fl, Nakornthon Hospital, Th Phra Ram II; packages from 1000B; access by taxi

The wellness centre of this Bangkok hospital has a traditional Thai medicine wing, combining spa therapy with ancient Thai techniques. The primary practice is the use of *tamrub thong*, which uses the application of gold leaf and herbs to rejuvenate skin and restore collagen. Other treatments focus on nutritional evaluations and aromatherapy to ensure the balance of the body's essential elements: earth, wind, water and fire.

### ORIENTAL SPA [Map pp108–9](#)

☎ 0 2659 0444; [www.mandarinoriental.com](http://www.mandarinoriental.com); Oriental Hotel, 48 Soi 38, Th Charoen Krung; half-day packages from 8400B; 📍 Saphan Taksin, 📍 from Oriental Hotel

This award-winning spa, set in a delightful riverside location opposite the Oriental

## BANGKOK MASSAGE 101

Bangkok has hundreds of massage options, from tiny shops with a couple of masseuses to resort-style spas that have honed pampering down to a fine art, via venerable training institutions such as Wat Pho, where centuries of tradition are maintained and passed on. Parlours offering Thai traditional massage are the most prevalent, typically with massage beds in the front window, colourful reflexology charts on the walls and foot or full-body massages selling for very reasonable rates.

But the world of Bangkok massage parlours can sometimes throw up unexpected scenarios. If you're a woman you can rest easy in the knowledge that you'll get, with varying degrees of quality, the massage you asked for. For men, however, your full-body 'oil massage' might involve techniques you didn't have in mind and which are definitely not on the curriculum at Wat Pho.

The tough part about this is that you never really know when you walk into a studio whether the massage is going to extend further up your inner thigh than is normally considered proper. It's not as if the parlours actually advertise 'Happy Endings 200B extra'. Indeed, many parlours actively discourage the practice, but masseuses are poorly paid and the opportunity to earn a bigger tip is often too hard to ignore.

So what should you do? First, if you're not actually looking for a 'happy ending' then start by avoiding massage parlours in Bangkok's sleazier neighbourhoods – Nana, Sukhumvit near Soi Cowboy or around Patpong. You can also avoid trouble by walking past the shops with young, attractive women in miniskirts sitting outside and choring 'Hello sir, massage?' Look instead for the older, stronger-looking women, who normally give better massage. Parlours off the main path are often a good bet.

Once you've chosen your parlour, choosing not to undress completely – or wearing the unisex disposable knickers provided – will go some way toward deterring wandering hands. But it's no guarantee. If your masseuse's 'innocent' rubbing goes too far it will deliberately be left open to your interpretation; you'll need to either ignore it both physically and verbally, or deal with it verbally.

Hotel, offers a full range of massage and health treatments. Privacy is the spa's main strength, with individual and couples' suites (shower, massage tables and steam room) keeping camera-shy celebs happy. Bookings are essential.

### RASAYANA RETREAT [Map pp118–19](#)

☎ 0 2662 4803; [www.rasayanaretreat.com](http://www.rasayanaretreat.com); 41/1 Soi Prommit off Soi 39, Th Sukhumvit; massage/packages from 500B/2800B; 📍 Phrom Phong Rasayana combines basic beauty and massage treatments with holistic healing techniques, such as detoxification, colonic irrigation and hypnotherapy, for reasonable prices.

### RUEN-NUAD MASSAGE & YOGA

[Map pp108–9](#)  
☎ 0 2632 2663; 42 Th Convent, Th Silom; 🕒 10am–10pm; 1hr traditional massage 350B; 📍 Sala Daeng, 📍 Silom

Just the right mix of old and new, Ruen-Nuad is set in a charming converted wooden house opposite BNH Hospital. It has partitioned massage stations, creating a mood of pampering and privacy typical of spa facilities, but at very reasonable parlour prices.

### SKILLS DEVELOPMENT CENTER FOR THE BLIND [Map pp124–5](#)

☎ 0 2583 7327; 78/2 Soi 1, Th Tiwanon, Pak Kret; 1½-hr massage in fan/air-con room 120/160B; 🕒 7am–6pm; 📍 Tha Pak Kret

This outreach centre north of central Bangkok trains the blind in the ancient techniques of Thai traditional massage, developing what many people consider to be expert masseurs. Getting out here can be half the fun. Take the Chao Phraya Express (p253) north to Tha Nonthaburi, where you will connect to a Laem Thong boat (5.45am to 5.45pm) to Tha Pak Kret. From the pier, hire a motorcycle taxi to take you to the Skills Development Center (one way 10B). You'll need to speak a little Thai to pull this off (ask for *suun pháthánaa sámáthàphâap khon taa bàwt*), but Pak Kret villagers are pretty easy-going and willing to listen to foreigners massacre their language. The easier option is to just get in a taxi and get the driver to call the centre for directions.

### WAT PHO THAI TRADITIONAL MASSAGE SCHOOL [Map p56](#)

☎ 0 2221 3686; [www.watpomassage.com](http://www.watpomassage.com); Soi Penphat, Th Sanamchai; 1hr Thai massage 300B, foot massage 250B; 🕒 8am–5pm; 📍 Tha Tien The school affiliated with Wat Pho is the