THE PERFECT 10
PANORAMIC BANGKOK

Hit the heights

The best vantage points for memorable city and river views

GARY WALSH

1 **ALL THAT GLISTENS:** The Golden Mount was, until the 1970s, Bangkok's highest spot. Part of the Wat Saket compound, this temple with its whitewashed, battlement-like walls and dazzling golden spire was built on the ruins of a collapsed stupa. Its highest point is more than 100m above the surrounding area, but the views in all directions are from a terrace 58m up, reached by 349 steps. It provides an instant impression of just how vertical Bangkok has become, and how contrasting its skyscrapers are to the old shophouses at the temple's base. More: au.tourismthailand.org.

2 **TO COIN A PHRASE:** Wat Arun is Bangkok's most recognisable landmark, even appearing on the 10-baht coin. It's under renovation at the moment; its porcelain-encrusted exterior is getting a spit and polish, so you can only climb a few metres above its base, but when it reopens fully (thought to be by the end of the year), visitors will be able to ascend ludicrously steep steps to a terrace about halfway up the temple's 80m height. The view of the Grand Palace complex on the opposite bank of the river is sublime, especially at sunset, somewhat counterintuitively given Wat Arun is known as the Temple of the Dawn. The temple itself is brilliantly lit after dark.

3 **NEW KID ON THE BLOCK:** The newest sky bar in town is Attitude, on the 26th floor of the AVANI Riverside Bangkok. The hotel is on a bend in the Chao Phraya River downstream from Taksin Bridge, opposite the bustling Asiatique Night Market and its giant ferris wheel. The bar has indoor and outdoor areas and cracking cocktails that are less expensive than at most rooftop bars. Try Molecules of Love: champagne, strawberry "caviar" and other ingredients somehow forgotten after a couple. Food from the open kitchen is excellent. The view from the Thonburi side of the Chao Phraya to central Bangkok as it lights up for the night is memorable. More: minorhotels.com/en/avani/riverside-bangkok.

4 **SHOP 'N' DROP:** Sukhumvit Road is Bangkok's premier shopping and business drag, and the Marriott 57's Octave Rooftop Lounge & Bar is its first really sky-high drinking spot. There are three levels starting from 45 floors up, with staggering views, particularly from the highest point with its 360-degree vista. It's a frankly sexy spot, with an island bar lit in electric blue when the sun sets, and bartenders who do the full juggling cocktail thing. The fusion food is very good, with plenty of snacks to help the Thai mojitos and similar mixes slip down. More: marriott.com.au.

ALAMY

Vertigo at Banyan Tree, above; converted rice barge of Manohra Cruises, right; rooftop of River View Guest House, far right; Wat Arun, below; Attitude, bottom

Checklist

THAI Airways International flies daily to Bangkok from Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth. More: thaiairways.com

5 **ZOOM GOES BOOM:** At Anantara Sathorn Bangkok, ZOOM Sky Bar offers a different perspective on the city from its 40th-floor vantage point, with the bright lights of the city's docklands in the foreground. Its expansive size and relative newness means you're unlikely to be cramped for space. There is a two-level terrace with comfortable lounges and bar seating, all with a 360-degree perspective of the city. Cocktails are very reasonably priced, service is excellent, and the menu of Thai-Chinese chef Adtavorn Charoonpontithi (otherwise known as chef Gibb) is innovative and impressive. More: bangkok-sathorn.anantara.com.

6 **TOP OF THE TREE:** The 61st floor of the Banyan Tree is sky bar nirvana, with the Vertigo and Moon Bar offering open-air drinking and dining at its finest. The long, narrow shape makes it feel like a ship sailing through the Bangkok night. Moon Bar's reputation precedes itself, and it can get insanely busy at sunset. If you have a reservation at Vertigo, you're assured a more relaxed experience. The 360-degree view over Sathorn Road, the river and CBD, is among the best in the city. A particularly nice touch is when your waiter takes a photo of you while dining, later presenting it to you in a commemorative frame.
More: banyantree.com/en/ap-thailand-bangkok.

7 **ALL ABOUT THE ATMOSPHERE:** You can't be guaranteed a meteorite blasting through the Earth's atmosphere and bathing the world in unearthly green light as you dine at the Pullman Hotel G's Scarlett Wine Bar & Restaurant, but it can add a certain excitement to your dining experience. Even without such a stellar cosmic event, Scarlett delivers fabulous French food and an equally spectacular view from the 37th floor above Silom Road. There's an open terrace and an enclosed dining room, both of which share the same brilliant panorama, with the serpentine Chao Phraya front and centre. More: pullmanbangkokhotelg.com.

8 **ROOM WITH A VIEW:** Most of the sky bars sit atop five-star hotels, with prices commensurate with the luxury and ambience. The River View Guest House is a much less imposing place lost in the tangled streets of Talad Noi district. There's a two-level bar and cafe on the eighth floor with a great perspective of the river as it curves gently downstream of the historic centre towards the business district. Local company Hivesters will take you there for a drink as part of a highly recommended walking tour of Talad Noi led by a local "aunty", or you can find your own way, which is easier said than done. It's also a great spot at lunchtime.
More: riverviewbkk.com; hivesters.com/home.

9 **UP A LAZY RIVER:** If we're talking bird's-eye views, it's only fair to consider the sight of, say, a duck paddling happily in the Chao Phraya. There are countless ways to enjoy a panorama of Bangkok, but the ground-level view from the river, especially at night, is simply gorgeous. River ferries and longtail boats stop around sunset, so a dinner cruise is the best way to enjoy the city as it lights up. Manohra Cruises has been plying the river in converted rice barges for years, serving excellent Thai food while gently chugging along in the cool of the evening. The Grand Palace and Wat Arun look especially alluring at night. More: manohracruises.com.

BEST BEDS

10 **SO SPECTACULAR:** Bangkok's main green space, Lumpini Park, spreads like an exotic carpet beneath the guestrooms, restaurants and bars of So Sofitel Bangkok. There is singular style here, highlighted by guest relations officer Khun Paul, with his Little Richard quiff and Edna Everage glasses. Staff are dressed in Christian Lacroix and accommodation is based on the four prime elements of water, metal, earth and wood. The 29th-floor Hi So bar and terrace overlooks Lumpini, and a level below is the superb Park Terrace restaurant, overseen by Australian Paul Smart, twice winner of Thailand's *Iron Chef* contest. This is Asian-European fusion cuisine on a grand, glorious scale. More: so-sofitel-bangkok.com.

Gary Walsh was a guest of THAI Airways International, Tourism Authority of Thailand and Accor Hotels.