Bangkok’s Canals

In the 19th century, Bangkok was known as the “Venice of the East,” since all transportation was by canal. Today, most of the canals to the east of the Chao Phraya River have been filled in to create new roads. However, the area to the west remains much as it was in the 19th century, with a network of waterways spreading out into the countryside. Here, visitors can get a taste of traditional canalside life and visit a few attractions such as Wat Arun and the Royal Barge Museum along the way.

Top 10 Features

1. Chao Phraya – River of Kings
2. Boats
3. Royal Barge Museum
4. Wat Arun
5. Traditional Thai Houses
6. Canalside Activities
7. Floating Vendors
8. Khlong Bangkok Yai
9. Khlong Bangkok Noi
10. Khlong Mon

Boats

The river carries such a wide range of vessels that it is great fun just to sit at a riverside café and watch the pageant flow. Huge barges chug downstream, while small ferries (above) nip from bank to bank, and longtail boats with bright awnings roar past.

Royal Barge Museum

This museum (see p89) contains a fabulous display of ornamented royal barges (below), which are about 165 ft (50 m) long. Also on display are dioramas of robes worn by royal rowers, and information on the use of the barges, which is limited to royal processions on the river.
**Wat Arun**
Established by King Rama I, Wat Arun (left) is known as the Temple of the Dawn. Its main features are the five prang (towers) which are encrusted with colorful pieces of porcelain (see pp26–7).

**Khlong Mon**
Branching off from the Chao Phraya River just north of Wat Arun, this canal (right) leads to an orchid farm where visitors step ashore for a look around before continuing to explore the canal.

**Khlong Bangkok Yai**
This canal is very popular with tour boats as it passes several temples, including Wat Kalayanamit, which has a huge Buddha image, and Wat Pak Nam, famous for its amulets. Many boats also stop at a snake farm and the floating market along Khlong Dao Khanong.

**Khlong Bangkok Noi**
Though it is now termed a khlong, or canal, this waterway was once the main channel of the Chao Phraya River. Near its entrance is the Royal Barge Museum and a little farther on is Wat Suwannaram which has some rich murals.

**Riding the Chao Phraya Express**
The cheapest way to explore Bangkok’s waterways is by riding the Chao Phraya Express, a river bus which runs between Sathorn Pier (Map M6) and Phra Athit Pier (Map B2). The complete journey takes around 75 minutes, passing by several historical sights, such as the Church of Santa Cruz (see p92), Wat Arun, Wat Phra Kaeo (see pp8–11), and Wat Rakhang (see p92).