Wat Pho

Bangkok’s oldest and largest temple, Wat Pho has the country’s longest Reclining Buddha. Built in the 16th century and reconstructed by Rama I (r. 1782–1809), it is a typical Thai temple, with resident monks, a school, massage pavilions, and a generally lived-in feel. Around the grounds are statues and chedi (stupas) glittering with mosaics.

Top 10 Features

1. Reclining Buddha
2. Feet of Reclining Buddha
3. Traditional Massage
4. Medicine Pavilion
5. The Bot
6. Miniature Mountains
7. Monks and Their Guti
8. Schoolkids and Classrooms
9. Great Chedi
10. Farang Guards

Most visitors enter the compound from Thanon Thai Wang, right next to the Reclining Buddha. However, the southern entrance on Soi Chetupon allows you to appreciate the rest of the compound in comparative peace before finally arriving at the temple’s most popular highlight.

Several basic food shops line the western border of the temple, including Rub Aroon, which serves refreshing fruit juices and coffees.

- Soi Chetuphon
- Map B5
- (02) 226 0335
- AC bus 503, 508, 512
- Open 8am–6pm daily
- Adm B50
- www.watpho.com

Reclining Buddha

The 151-ft (46-m) long, 50-ft (15-m) high Reclining Buddha, made of brick, plaster, and gold leaf, fills the wihan (assembly hall) in the northwest corner of the temple compound. Visitors are guided first past the face, with its serene expression, and then to the feet, which are studded with mother-of-pearl inlay.

Feet of Reclining Buddha

The soles of the feet of the Reclining Buddha are inlaid with 108 lakshana, or auspicious images that identify the true Buddha. Crafted in shimmering mother-of-pearl, these images are a dazzling work of art (below).

Traditional Massage

Wat Pho is known as a center for traditional medicine and since the 1960s has run what is considered the best massage school in Thailand. Highly trained masseurs are on hand to relieve visitors of their aches and pains. The school also offers 10- or 15-day massage courses, which are taught in both Thai and English.
The Medicine Pavilion now functions as a souvenir shop for tourists.

Medicine Pavilion
Located in the heart of the complex, the Medicine Pavilion has stone tablets (above) indicating the pressure points on the body that should be used during traditional Thai massage.

The Bot
This ordination hall is Wat Pho’s largest building, and contains a large bronze image of a meditating Buddha (below), in the base of which are the ashes of Rama I.

Miniature Mountains
Scattered around the complex are several man-made mounds on which are statues of hermits in unusual postures. These are intended to teach people the healing positions for the body.

Monks and Their Guti
Away from the wihan housing the Reclining Buddha, visitors might encounter monks who work at the temple. They live in guti (small, simple rooms) in a compound to the south of the temple.

Schoolkids and Classrooms
In Wat Pho, as in many Thai temples, there is a school for children. At playtime, the temple compound echoes with their excited screams. Some may even try a few words of English on visitors.

Reclining Buddhas
To a person unfamiliar with Buddhism, a Reclining Buddha appears to be relaxing or even sleeping, but this interpretation could not be farther from the truth. While other images of him standing, sitting, or walking show aspects of his quest to attain Enlightenment, a Reclining Buddha symbolizes his arrival at Nirvana, a state of all-knowing awareness that is the complete antithesis of relaxation or sleep.

Farang Guards
Adding a whimsical touch to this temple of learning are huge stone caricatures of Westerners, farang in Thai, wearing top hats (right). These guards stand beside the gateways to the inner courtyard of the temple. The statues arrived as ballast on trade ships returning from China.

Great Chedi
There are about 100 chedi in the grounds of Wat Pho (above), but the four most important, situated in the western courtyard, are the Great Chedi, which honor the first four kings of the Chakri dynasty (see p34). The chedi are decorated with porcelain mosaic.