National Museum
Thailand's premier museum offers a great introduction to Thai history. Inside, the Buddhaisawan Chapel is one of the country's most precious treasures, as is the Phra Sihing Buddha image it houses. Other highlights include well-preserved fragments of Dvaravati and Srivajaya statues, as well as the Ramkhamhaeng inscription.

During the Songkran festival every year the Phra Sihing Buddha image is paraded around Sanam Luang see p48

Top 10 Features

1. Buddhaisawan Chapel
2. Phra Sihing Buddha Image
3. Dvaravati Wheel of Law
4. Gallery of Thai History
5. Lanna Art
6. Sukhothai Art
7. Red House
8. Royal Funeral Chariots Gallery
9. Rattanakosin Art
10. Ayutthayan Art

Buddhaisawan Chapel
This beautiful Thai temple was built in 1787 for the Second King and now sits at the heart of the National Museum complex. Its rich murals, polished floors, gilt Buddha images, and hushed atmosphere make it a special place (above).

Phra Sihing Buddha Image
One of three such images claiming to be the original, this small but superbly crafted Sukhothai-style sculpture sits on a pedestal in the Buddhaisawan Chapel (above) and is bathed in a golden glow.

Dvaravati Wheel of Law
Dvaravati art flourished from the 6th to the 9th centuries, and this 8th-century stone wheel set above a deer is an excellent example (below). Located on the second floor of the south wing, it represents the Buddha's first sermon in Sarnath, India.
**Lanna Art**
Several small Buddha images from the Lanna period, 13th–16th centuries, are on display here (above).

**Sukhothai Art**
Sukhothai art is often considered to be the apex of Thai artistic achievement, and the flowing lines of walking and sitting Buddha images in the museum fully support this notion (below).

**Ayutthayan Art**
Huge, serene Buddha heads, as well as scripture cabinets (above) adorned with scenes of Ayutthaya in its heyday, are displayed in the Ayutthayan gallery.

**Rattanakosin Art**
The Rattanakosin era dates from the 18th century. Its art blends Western influences with traditional Thai art. The last gallery in the north wing of the museum displays examples of Rattanakosin paintings and furnishings (below).

**Red House**
A fine example of an Ayutthaya-style teak house, the Red House (above) was originally the home of Rama I’s (r.1782–1809) older sister, Sri Suriyen. It has a multi-tiered roof decorated with beautiful carvings, and the interior contains some antique royal furnishings.

**Royal Funeral Chariots Gallery**
The elaborately decorated carriages in this gallery give an idea of the pomp and ceremony that accompany royal funerals. Each of the gilded teak carriages weighs several tons and needs hundreds of men to pull them.

**Origin of the National Museum**
The site on which the National Museum now stands was once the home of the Second King of Thailand. It was built for Rama I’s viceroy, Prince Wang Na, in 1782. However, a century later, in 1887, Rama V decided to abolish the office of the Second King and turned the building into the country’s first museum so that the people in his kingdom could appreciate their rich cultural heritage.