Moments in History

1. **1767: Ayutthaya Overrun by the Burmese**
   After 400 years of being one of Asia’s most powerful empires, the Kingdom of Ayutthaya (see pp28–31) was finally overrun by Burmese troops in 1767. Though the Burmese were expelled within a year, Ayutthaya was deemed unsafe as a capital and General Taksin chose Thonburi as the new capital of Siam (now Thailand).

2. **1782: Bangkok Founded**
   Just 15 years later, a rebellion against Taksin’s autocratic rule led to his demise. He was succeeded by General Chao Phraya Chakri who established the Chakri Dynasty and acquired the official title of Rama I. On assuming the throne, his first action was to move the capital east across the river to Bangkok.

3. **1851: Rama IV Crowned**
   After living 27 years as a monk, King Mongkut acceded to the throne and became Rama IV of the Chakri Dynasty. He is regarded by Thais as the man who began to modernize Siam, particularly through treaties that opened the country to trade with the West.

4. **1868: Rama V Crowned**
   Chulalongkorn, son of Rama IV, succeeded his father as Rama V of the Chakri Dynasty when he was only 15 years old. He ruled for over 40 years and is credited with keeping Siam free from the clutches of colonial powers such as England and France, which were carving up Southeast Asia at the time.

5. **1893: First Railroad Line**
   Rama V carried on his father’s programme of modernization of the country, and in 1893 the country’s first railroad line opened, stretching just 14 miles (22 km) to Pak Nam, where the Chao Phraya River flows into the Gulf of Thailand. The line was later extended to the south, north, and northeast of the country.

6. **1932: Constitutional Monarchy**
   The absolute power of the Siamese monarchy was ended by a bloodless coup in 1932 that brought the military to power. Though the monarchy continued to be respected, the stage was set for a string of coups and counter coups that dominated the politics of Thailand for the rest of the century.
Thailand was officially known as Siam until 1939 and again between 1945 and 1949.

Top 10 Famous Thais

1. Chang and Eng Bunker
   - Born in Bangkok, the original Siamese Twins (1811–74) settled in the USA, married and fathered 22 children before dying within hours of each other.

2. Plaek Pibulsonggram
   - Prime Minister and military dictator for around 15 years, Pibulsonggram changed Siam’s name to Thailand in 1939.

3. Kukrit Pramoj
   - Thailand’s 13th prime minister (1975–6) was honored in 1985 as National Artist for his literary works.

4. Prem Tinsulanonda
   - The country’s prime minister from 1980–88 and one of the closest advisors to King Rama IX.

5. Anand Panyarachun
   - Serving twice as prime minister in the early 1990s, he made long-overdue reforms to the Thai constitution in 1996.

6. Khaosai Galaxy
   - The “Thai Tyson”, Khaosai was WBA Super Flyweight champion from 1984 to 1992, defending his title 19 times.

7. Porntip Nakhirunkanok
   - Crowned Miss Universe in 1988, she won this ultimate accolade for a country famed for its beautiful women.

8. Thongchai McIntyre
   - Known as “Bird,” Thailand’s biggest pop idol has also acted in movies and on TV.

9. Paradorn Srichaphan
   - Thailand’s most successful tennis player appeared on the cover of Time and is known for his polite court manners.

10. Aum Patcharapa
    - This film and soap-opera star is Thailand’s most famous actress and model.

1946: Rama IX Ascends the Throne

After the death of his brother King Mahidol, who was shot in the head while in bed, King Bhumibol Adulyadej took the throne as Rama IX. He continues to rule as the world’s longest-reigning monarch.

1992: Military Government Ousted

Thais demonstrated publicly their displeasure following a military coup in 1992. After the army gunned down many citizens on the streets of Bangkok, Rama IX intervened, resulting in the self-proclaimed Prime Minister, General Suchinda Kraprayoon, making a hasty exit and democracy being restored.

2006: Thaksin Ousted

Thailand’s self-styled “CEO leader” Thaksin Shinawatra swept to power in 2001 as head of the Thai Rak Thai party, inspiring people with his business acumen. However, he was ousted for corruption in yet another military coup in September 2006.

2011: Thailand’s First Female Prime Minister

Thaksin Shinawatra’s sister Yingluck was elected Thailand’s first female Prime Minister, and the youngest in over 60 years, in a landslide victory in 2011. One of the main goals of her Pheu Thai party is to return Thaksin from exile.