Buddhist Temples

1. **Wat Phra Kaeo**
   - For many visitors, the highlight of their stay in Bangkok is a visit to Wat Phra Kaeo, to see beautiful examples of Buddhist art and architecture. It has a glittering array of chedi, libraries, mausoleums, and the small jadeite Buddha that is the nation's greatest treasure (see pp8–11).

2. **Wat Pho**
   - Bangkok’s biggest and oldest temple, Wat Pho’s main attraction is its 150-ft (46-m) long Reclining Buddha. This wat is more typical of temples countrywide than Wat Phra Kaeo because it has resident monks who live in simple lodgings within the complex. It also runs a respected school of massage (see pp14–15).

3. **Wat Arun**
   - The Temple of Dawn, or Wat Arun, is a striking Bangkok landmark. Its unusual design, with one huge central prang (tower) and four others around it, shows the strong influence of Khmer architecture. It enjoyed a spell of glory between 1767 and 1782, when it housed the Emerald Buddha before the statue was transferred to Wat Phra Kaeo. Wat Arun is best viewed at sunset from across the Chao Phraya River (see pp26–7).

4. **Wat Mahathat**
   - Prince Mongkut spent 24 years as a monk in Wat Mahathat, before he became Rama IV (see p34). Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University and a meditation center are housed here. Mahathat Road • Map B3 • (02) 221 5999 • Open 7am–8pm daily

5. **Wat Benjamabophit**
   - The last major temple to be built in Bangkok, this is more commonly referred to by Western visitors as the Marble Temple because of its Carrara marble bot. The cloisters contain over 50 Buddha images displaying a variety of mudra (hand gestures). The main Buddha image is a copy of the Phra Buddha Chinarat that resides in Phitsanulok in northern Thailand (see p90).

6. **Wat Suthat**
   - One of the most important temples in Thailand, Wat Suthat was built in the early 19th century to house the 26-ft (8-m) tall, bronze Buddha image from Sukhothai, which sits in the wihan, surrounded by colorful murals. The galleries around the wihan hold over 150 Buddha images. The towering Sao Ching Cha, or Giant Swing, once used in a Brahmin ceremony, stands in front of the temple (see p65).
All Thai men are expected to join the monkhood at some point in their lives – usually for three months when they are 20 years old.

Wat Bowoniwet
Built in 1826, this temple has gained significance for being the place where Siamese and Thai kings are ordained and as the base of Buddhism in Thailand.
- 240 Phra Sumen Road • Map C2
- (02) 280 0869 • Open 8am–5pm daily
- www.watbowon.org

Wat Saket and the Golden Mount
Built by Rama I in the late 18th century, this temple has some excellent murals and a peaceful atmosphere. The main reason people visit here is to climb the Golden Mount, a 250-ft (76-m) high man-made hill, to view the Old City landmarks (see p64).

Wat Traimit
This temple compound looks rather ordinary, but it is firmly fixed on the tourist trail because of the Golden Buddha, a 10-ft (3-m) high Sukhothai-style image made of solid gold (see p73).

Wat Rachabophit
A blend of local and Western architecture, this temple was built in the late 19th century by Rama V (see p34).

Top 10 Elements of a Thai Temple Compound
1. Wihan
   The main assembly hall where the head abbot gives sermons and people pray.
2. Bot
   The ordination hall, which is usually smaller than the wihan. Highly decorated, it is off-limits to women.
3. Chedi
   These dome-shaped religious monuments, or stupas, have relics sealed within their base.
4. Bodhi Tree
   This tree (Ficus religiosa) symbolizes Enlightenment, as the Buddha was sitting beneath a Bodhi tree when he attained Nirvana.
5. Ho Trai
   The library stores sacred texts and is often raised off the ground to avoid floods.
6. Guti
   These are monks’ living quarters, usually just a small wooden room on stilts.
7. Murals
   Temple murals depict incidents from the life of the Buddha, and some record scenes of Thai daily life.
8. Buddha Images
   Usually the most highly valued Buddha image is placed in the wihan. Others may sit or stand in the bot or cloisters.
9. Monks
   Holy men who follow the Buddha’s teachings and advise lay people on their problems.
10. Novices
    Young men live as novices in the temple before being ordained as monks.