

One slick city

On a mission to join the world of technological style and sophistication, Claire Brown discovers Bangkok's new found high-end status with wealthy queues forming at the counters of branded luxury.



Ladies and gentlemen, I have finally joined the modern age. I write this month's missive from a Mac. In fact, let me get this right, it is a Macbook Pro. It was incredibly baffling for the first five minutes and I couldn't imagine ever getting to grips with it, but after my tantrum (at the age of 36 I still appear to be stuck in the "terrible twos" – maybe I am teething or something) I seem to be taking to it pretty well. Ducks, water, moi?

This move away from my trusty old Toshiba has been an ongoing battle and in the end my better half confiscated the Tosh and frog-marched me kicking and biting to the Apple store. You see I like things that I know. Call me old fashioned but that means buying CDs instead of downloading music and flatly refusing to upgrade my very old Nokia that has no features or 'apps' aside from being able to text and call (what more should a phone be required to do and hey, I still love the polyphonic ring tone – it's a classic piece of 'choonage'). Admittedly though, the Mac is impressive... and who ever would have thought that typing could actually feel sexy?

So we went to the Emporium in Bangkok to pick up this baby and whilst trying to accidentally wander off-piste into my favourite shoe store instead of going to a boring old technology shop, it hit me like a brick – Bangkok has become as affluent as Hong Kong. In fact, I

would say it is a tad more so. What used to be a noisy, hot, hawker infested and culturally mind-boggling Asian city has transformed itself very gradually into this sophisticated, fashionable metropolis.

Of course, no modern city is complete without the suite of must-have designer stores: Gucci, Prada, Hermes, Chanel and so on, but the difference in BKK is that they are full. Not only of ultra-luxe goods, but with people shopping. I mean actually buying things, and lots of them. These super chic malls are simply no longer the domain of the occasional smug expat. They are filled with Thais who seem to be involved in some kind of manic shop-a-thon. A trolley dash of biblical proportions! I kept expecting Dale Winton to jump out and congratulate them. And my goodness are they a well-heeled bunch. In my distressed J-brand jean shorts and Miu Miu leather satchel (usually a safe bet for a casual "Sunday look"), next to these beautifully turned out princes and princesses I felt more like I was channeling Robinson Crusoe than Alexa Chung. (Note to self – you aren't her and you never will be, nor do you really want to be, so pop some lipstick on and get on with it).

I noticed that Tuk Tuks are also a rare sight these days and really have become a cutesy tourist gimmick rather than a real means of transport. The new traditional Thai vehicle in this fabulously

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dynamic city has become the Porsche Cayenne, Range Rover Supersport or the Lamborghini and when you consider the 300 per cent luxury tax, the average price of a decent set of wheels here is somewhere around half a million bucks. Yikes!

Compare these incredulous displays of wealth (there was a queue at the till in the Rolex shop) with scenes of misery in Greece, news of unheard of levels of unemployment in the US and with the comedy president Sarkozy in an ever higher pair of Cuban heels, desperate to assert his masculinity and get elected again amidst the lefties threatening to implement a 75 per cent tax on the soon to be less wealthy. It's another world out here.

Also very noteworthy, the Thai Baht is still gathering strength next to a crippled UK pound (can you believe in just a few years it has gone from a steady THB65 to the pound to just THB46?), a floundering Euro and a continuously shaky dollar and it soon becomes clear that you folks with money to invest need to get yourselves here.

Bangkok property is catching up with London. Koh Samui is turning into Ibiza and Pattaya is getting a facelift. In fact, according to a Worldwide Cost of Living survey conducted by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), Bangkok is now the second costliest city to live in Southeast Asia, just behind Singapore.

Don't wait to long or you might find yourselves priced out of the market.



Claire Brown

formed Claire Brown Realty in 2004 having worked for various developers across South East Asia. Her roles included sales and marketing, project management, construction planning and consultancy. As well as running the business, Claire is also developing her own project in Bali, a luxury villa and spa retreat in the beautiful and somewhat undiscovered province of Tabanan. She enjoys travel, food and wine, interior design and shopping – in no particular order.
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