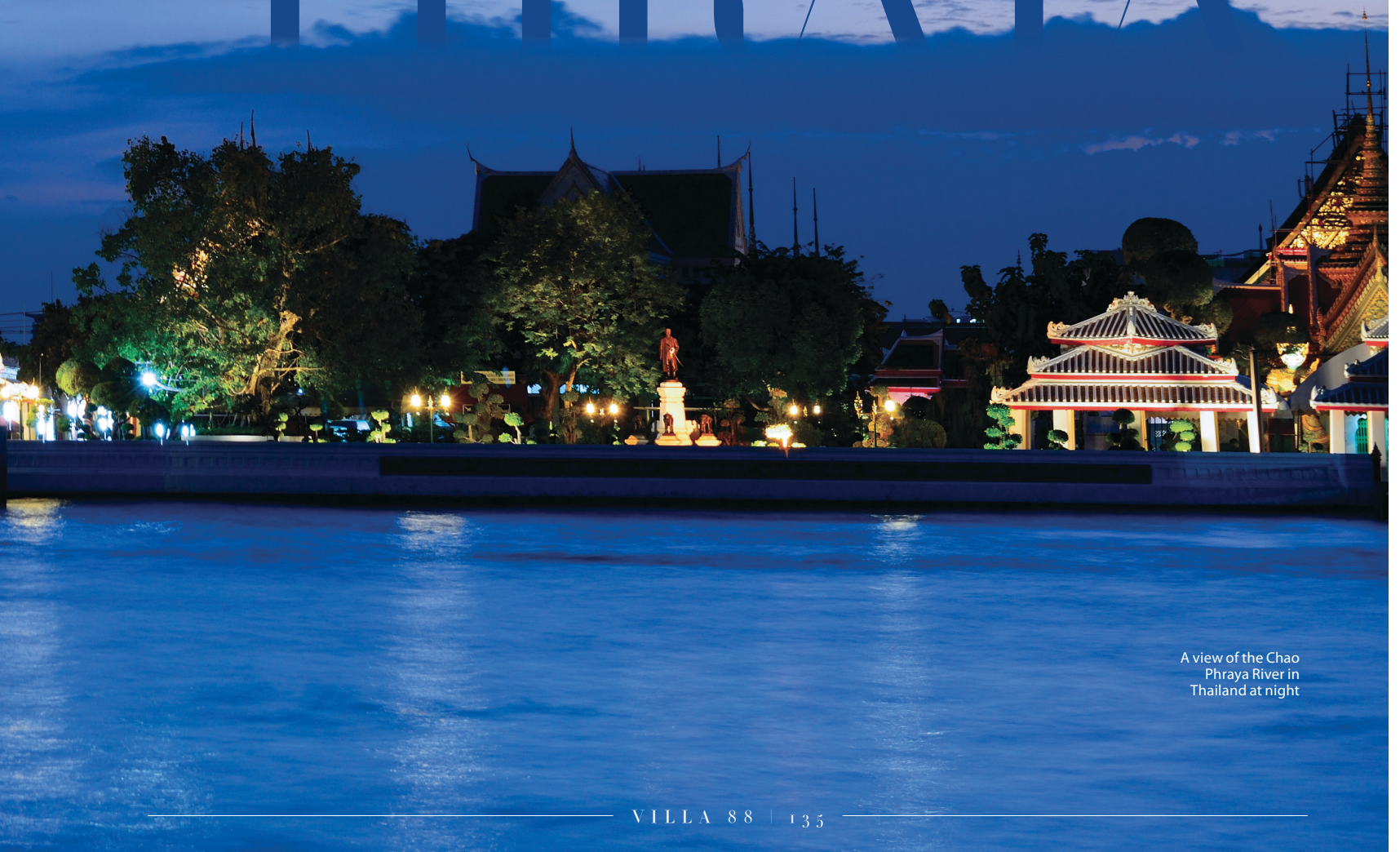




Often overlooked as a
transit point to
Thailand's paradisiac
beaches, Bangkok's
vibrant culinary offerings,
leisure activities and
upcoming luxury
accommodation projects
make it an exciting weekend
getaway and put in on the radar
as a new investment hub.
Cassidy Hazelbaker explores

ON THE BANKS OF THE PHRA CHAO RAYA



A view of the Chao
Phraya River in
Thailand at night

Bangkok at night is an urban metropolis whose streets heave with lights, energy, and a cacophony of car horns as automobiles, three-wheeled tuk tuks and motorbikes melt together in a steady stream of traffic.

I crane my neck; my eyes straining to take in the incredible street scenes unfolding before me as the car I ride in edges towards my dinner destination. Sidewalk vendors hawk their wares, offering passers-by the chance to sample sizzling delicacies or take home clothes, jewelry, and assorted trinkets. The warm evening air is tinged with humidity, lulling me into a state of wonder as I observe the action.

A few minutes later, the car turns into a quiet side street and deposits me in a garden of lush plants. The hustle and bustle witnessed previously is quickly replaced by a calm serenity as I approach a wooden structure nestled amidst the foliage. I have arrived at Bo.lan, which was recently voted as one of Asia's top 50 restaurants. Resembling a typical Thai house, the dimly-lit restaurant is at once cozy and stylish, welcoming diners to a culinary adventure through authentic Thai flavors presented with a modern touch.

The meal begins with an unusual twist — I am treated to a tour of the kitchen, where chef Dylan Jones whips up a mangosteen and coconut rice amuse-bouche paired with a

friendly chat about the restaurant's history and his passion for Thai cooking. Once settled back into a private dining room, I indulge in the tasting menu, sampling complex dishes crafted from a mélange of herbs, chilies and traditional sauces. My personal favorites are the salad made from edible flowers with pomelo wedges and smashed ocean prawns, and the phanaeng chicken curry, made from coconut cream, peanuts, and a long list of spices. Bo.lan works closely with local farmers, ensuring that its kitchen serves healthy and locally-sourced products while sustaining the local community, and endeavors to achieve a zero carbon rating by 2018. I leave Bo.lan properly satiated and enthusiastic to explore the city further.

By day, Bangkok's myriad temples, museums, and art galleries open to the public. I head to the Museum of Contemporary Art to see how today's artists are reworking Thai heritage and customs through unconventional expressions. The museum contains pieces handpicked from the private collection of telecoms tycoon and art aficionado

Boonchai Bencharongkul. Smooth white museum walls provide a blank canvas upon which the often colorful and always dramatic works of art are displayed. Themes such as social knowledge, Buddhism, fantasy, and classical literature are explored throughout the museum's five floors.

I am struck most by a large egg-shaped structure containing a work entitled *Passage Across the Universe*, where visitors walk through a dark tunnel dotted with a sprinkling of stars and an illuminated galaxy. The tunnel eventually opens into an exhibit hall, where a seven-meter-tall triptych entitled *The Three Kingdoms* uses calm shades of green and blue to depict the serenity of heaven while menacing skeletal forms in shades of red and brown convey the chaos of Earth and beyond. Thailand's most famous contemporary sculptors are also represented at the museum, including the late Paitun Muangsomboon, whose animal sculptures stand boldly in the entrance foyer.

Contemporary change is not limited to Thai art but can be spotted throughout the city of Bangkok as well. The capital is currently undergoing several urban renewal projects to inject new energy into pockets of the city. One such initiative is located along the banks of the Chao Phraya River, where green spaces surrounding temples and heritage buildings will lead to a boardwalk at the river's edge. Country Group, a local real estate developer, is bringing additional glamour to the area through the construction of a Capella Hotel, Four Seasons Hotel and 73-storey Four Seasons Private Residences on 14.2 acres of land next to the new park. Upon completion in 2018, the estate will be the city's go-to address, with unobstructed panoramic views of the river and Bangkok's skyline.

Country Group plans to redefine waterfront living in Bangkok, as the residence tower's one-of-a-kind geometric design ensures all 355 apartments are corner units with dual city and river views. Apartment sizes range from two

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An aerial view of
Bangkok





Sleek and contemporary interior design at the Four Seasons Hotel Bangkok

bedrooms to penthouse suites, all boasting ample living spaces with a luminous, airy design. Only high-quality materials and top-of-the-line appliances will be used in the project, in line with Four Seasons standards, but what really set the project apart are the amenities available to residents. A private lounge along the waterfront promenade will be an ideal venue to entertain guests or enjoy a relaxing evening meal, while an amenities deck on the third floor will feature an infinity pool surrounded by private cabanas, a fitness center, and a multipurpose function room where residents can hold gatherings or banquets. Finally, the exclusive triplex Four Season Club will offer such novelties as a golf simulator, a cigar lounge, a hangout room for children and teens, a private film screening room and Bangkok's tallest residential infinity pool on the 66th floor.

Discerning travelers not yet ready to purchase a residence will still be able to enjoy the luxurious lifestyle of the Chao Phraya estate at either the sleekly elegant Four Seasons Hotel or the all-suite Capella Hotel. Guests will be able to pamper themselves with uber-relaxing treatments at the award-winning Auriga Spa and gastronomic temptations from celebrity chefs preparing flavors from all over the world. The next day, I hop aboard a river cruise to take a look at the impressive Chao Phraya estate from the water. Just minutes away from the construction, hundreds of years of Siamese history unfold before me as the boat glides past the towering Wat Arun, the brightly-colored sloping roofs of Wat Pho, and the sprawling Grand Palace compound.

My lazy afternoon along the Chao Phraya river passes by in a flash and soon it is time for me to bid Bangkok goodbye and jump aboard my overnight flight back to Dubai. My weekend in Bangkok has been filled with incredible meals, beautiful sights and the thrill of knowing that new adventures will await my next visit.

For further information on the upcoming Capella and Four Seasons properties, see chaophrayaestate.com