

Tatsuya Okamura, a man who knows the world.

Tatsuya Okamura's Jewelry and Health Travels in Thailand (2026)

Thailand — A Jewel Discovered *Beyond the Smile*

I departed from Kansai International Airport for the Kingdom of Thailand.

What I discovered in the “Land of Smiles” was an inner jewel hidden beneath the surface of a rapidly changing nation.

Golden temples shimmering under the tropical sun, vibrant local markets overflowing with energy, and a culture of food and therapeutic traditions designed to restore both body and mind — Thailand is far more than a tourist destination. It is a mirror reflecting the relationship between health, spirituality, economics, and the transformation of modern society itself. The direct flight to Suvarnabhumi International Airport takes approximately six and a half hours.



What I encountered in Thailand was not merely tourism, but the visible intersection of history, wellness, food culture, economic growth, and national transformation.

This chronicle explores the essence of the Kingdom through three principal lenses: **health**, **culinary culture**, and **economics**, while uncovering landscapes that shine like hidden jewels across Southeast Asia.



The Kingdom of Thailand, with a land area of approximately 513,120 square kilometers and a population of around **70 million people**, possesses a national territory roughly 1.4 times larger than **Japan**. Bangkok serves as the capital, while **Buddhism is practiced by approximately 90 to 95 percent of the population**.

Thailand's nominal GDP stands at approximately **558 billion USD**, **ranking around 25th globally**. Average life expectancy is approximately 80 years for women and 73 years for men.

Japan, by contrast, maintains a GDP of approximately 4.2 trillion USD, although this has declined from approximately 5.2 trillion USD in 2013, accompanied by a gradual decline in global ranking. Nevertheless, Japan continues to sustain one of the world's highest life expectancies, with women averaging 87 years and men 81 years.



Bangkok itself is a city where skyscrapers and Buddhist temples coexist in remarkable harmony.

The essence of this metropolis lies in the coexistence of modernity and spiritual faith. Daily life shaped by Buddhism cultivates discipline, emotional stability, and an inner calm that softens the psychological pressures of urban life.





Thailand's **culinary culture** offers another defining characteristic of the nation.

Signature dishes such as Tom Yum Goong and Gapao Rice make extensive use of spices, herbs, oils, and sugar, while salt levels tend to range from moderate to relatively high. Although spices contribute to metabolic stimulation and vitality, the higher intake of sugar and oils simultaneously increases the risks associated with lifestyle-related diseases.



In fact, Thailand's obesity rate is estimated at approximately 10 to 15 percent, while diabetes prevalence is believed to be around 10 percent of the population.

By contrast, traditional Japanese cuisine emphasizes low-fat nutrition, fermented foods, fish-based meals, and balanced dietary composition. As a result, Japan maintains one of the lowest obesity rates among developed nations, at approximately 4 percent.

The relationship between food culture and longevity becomes unmistakably clear.

One of Bangkok's most iconic architectural landmarks is **the King Power Mahanakhon**.

Standing approximately **314 meters tall** across 78 floors, the tower is recognized for its striking "pixelated" exterior design, appearing as though sections of the structure have been carved away from the façade itself. This unfinished visual effect symbolizes both urban transformation and the evolving nature of modern Bangkok.



At the summit lies the famous SkyWalk observation deck, where visitors can overlook the vast Bangkok skyline from a **dramatic glass-floor** platform suspended high above the city.

The complex also incorporates luxury residences and the internationally renowned hotel, The Standard, Bangkok Mahanakhon.

Interestingly, the tower was designed by German architect *Ole Scheeren*, whose work often explores the relationship between architecture, human movement, and urban identity.



As a side note, Thailand also faces disparities in healthcare accessibility between urban and rural regions. While such inequalities influence life expectancy, the impact of daily dietary habits and lifestyle patterns appears even more significant.



Traditional Thai massage, which combines yoga-inspired stretching techniques with acupressure therapy, contributes to improved circulation, autonomic nervous system regulation, and flexibility. More importantly, it reflects a philosophy centered not on treatment after illness, but on prevention and physical adjustment before disease emerges.



Bangkok's urban railway system also reveals much about the city's developmental character.

Unlike Japan, where underground subway systems dominate metropolitan transportation, Bangkok has evolved through a layered network combining elevated railways and underground metro systems.



The Bangkok Skytrain (BTS), an elevated railway system, serves as the primary transportation artery connecting major commercial districts and business centers throughout the city. Meanwhile, the underground MRT network complements this system

by providing broader radial and circular connectivity across Bangkok's expanding urban landscape.



In addition, the Airport Rail Link offers efficient transportation between the city center and Suvarnabhumi International Airport.



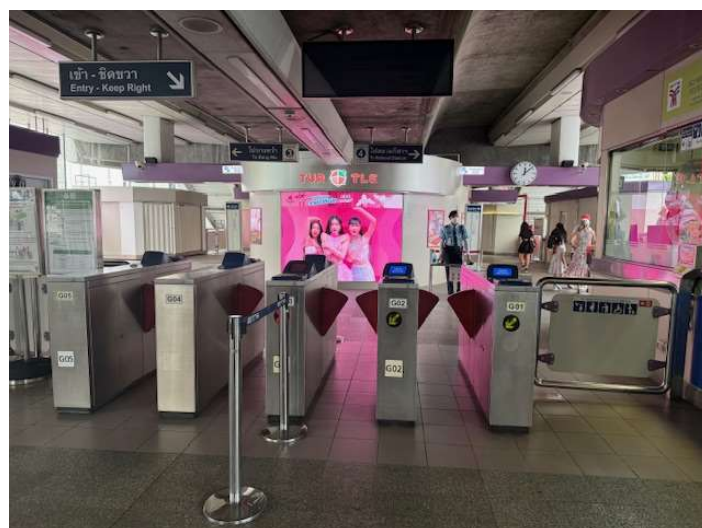
One of the most distinctive aspects of Bangkok's railway infrastructure is that, despite rapid expansion, the network remains only partially integrated. Transfers between BTS and MRT systems often require passengers to exit ticket gates, and fare cards are not yet fully unified. Consequently, Bangkok has not yet achieved the seamless transportation efficiency commonly associated with Japan.



Fares remain relatively affordable, generally beginning between 16 and 40 baht depending on distance. In a city notorious for chronic traffic congestion, however, rail transportation remains the most reliable means of movement in terms of punctuality and comfort.

Air-conditioned train cars, direct connections to major shopping complexes and luxury hotels, and expanding urban coverage continue to improve convenience for both residents and international visitors.

Nevertheless, areas still exist where railway coverage remains incomplete, requiring integration with taxis, motorcycles, or tuk-tuks for shorter local journeys.





In this sense, Bangkok's transportation infrastructure represents not a fully completed system, but rather a dynamic and evolving urban organism growing alongside the city itself.

Its incompleteness is precisely what gives it energy.





Thailand's national currency is the Thai baht.

Currently, one baht equals approximately 4.2 to 4.5 Japanese yen.

Exchange rate fluctuations themselves symbolize broader economic realities.

Twelve years ago, one baht traded at approximately 3.1 yen. Even six years ago, the rate remained around 3.3 yen. Today, however, the weakening yen has pushed the exchange rate to approximately 4.2 to 4.5 yen per baht.



For Japanese visitors, rising local prices are immediately noticeable.

GDP trends further reinforce this structural transformation.

Japan's GDP has declined from approximately 5.2 trillion USD in 2013 to around 4.2 trillion USD in 2025. Thailand, meanwhile, has grown from approximately 420 billion USD to approximately 558 billion USD during the same period.

As a result, the economic gap between the two nations has narrowed from roughly twelve times to approximately seven times.

This reflects both Japan's relative decline and Thailand's steady economic ascent.

Another iconic symbol of Thailand is the tuk-tuk.



The tuk-tuk, a three-wheeled taxi commonly seen throughout Bangkok and across Thailand, represents both practical transportation and the spirit of the nation itself.

Its most distinctive characteristic lies in its compact and open-air structure. With its three-wheel design and exceptional maneuverability, the tuk-tuk navigates Bangkok's congested streets with surprising efficiency.

Although covered by a roof, its open sides allow passengers to feel the wind directly while traveling through the city, creating a uniquely immersive and energetic experience suited to Thailand's tropical climate.

At the same time, passengers are exposed to traffic noise, heat, and exhaust fumes, which form part of the raw authenticity of the experience.



Unlike conventional taxis, tuk-tuks generally operate without meters, requiring passengers to negotiate fares before boarding. While tourists may occasionally be quoted higher prices, the negotiation itself has become part of the cultural interaction.

More importantly, the tuk-tuk transcends its role as a simple vehicle.

Many are decorated with colorful lighting, neon accents, and uniquely personalized designs, symbolizing the vibrancy, freedom, and spontaneity of Thai urban culture.

Ultimately, the tuk-tuk is not a mode of transportation defined purely by efficiency or comfort.

It is transportation as experience itself — a moving symbol of Thailand's energy, rhythm, and cultural identity.







The time difference between **Japan** and **Thailand** is **minus two hours**.
In other words, when it is 7:00 PM in Japan, it is 5:00 PM in Thailand.

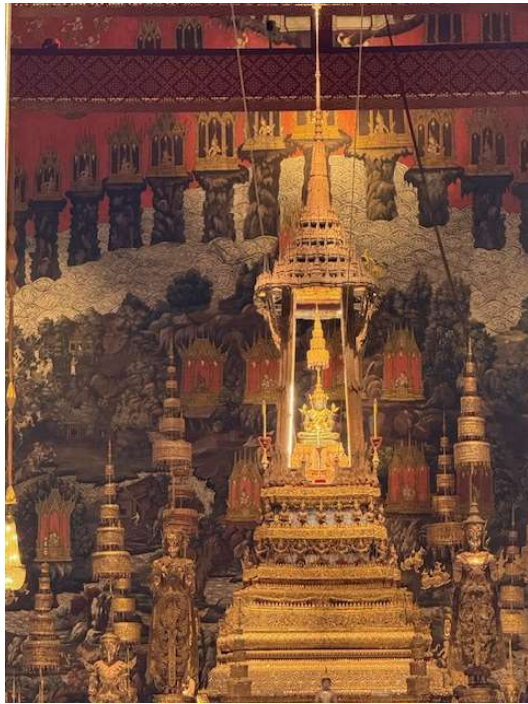
Thailand's climate belongs to **the tropical monsoon zone**, characterized by consistently high temperatures and humidity throughout the year. Broadly speaking, the country experiences three primary seasons: the cool season, the hot season, and the rainy season.

The cool season generally extends from November through February. During this period, temperatures become relatively mild, humidity decreases, and the climate is considered the most comfortable of the year. Particularly in the mornings and evenings, a refreshing coolness can occasionally be felt, making this the peak tourist season.

The hot season lasts from approximately March to May and represents the hottest period of the year. Daytime temperatures frequently exceed 35 degrees Celsius, while the perceived heat often feels even more intense. Consequently, protection from direct sunlight and proper hydration become essential.

The rainy season continues from June through October under the influence of the southwest monsoon. Short but intense downpours known as "squalls" are characteristic of this season. Rather than continuous rainfall throughout the day, heavy rain tends to arrive suddenly before clearing relatively quickly. Depending on the region and timing, however, flooding and transportation disruptions may occur.

Thus, heat forms the fundamental climatic condition of Thailand throughout the year, while seasonal differences are largely defined by fluctuations in temperature and precipitation.



Thailand's climate has also profoundly influenced agriculture, cuisine, architecture, and lifestyle. The widespread use of spices in Thai cuisine and the country's open-air architectural styles can both be understood as cultural adaptations to this tropical environment.

In this sense, Thailand's climate is not merely a natural condition. It serves as a foundational force shaping daily life, culture, health, and even economic activity across the nation.



In recent years, geopolitical risk has also become impossible to ignore.

The Strait of Hormuz, through which approximately 20 percent of the world's crude oil supply passes, remains one of the most strategically important maritime corridors on earth. Any escalation of tensions in the region immediately affects energy prices, logistics, and currency markets worldwide. Japan, with its heavy dependence on imported energy resources, is particularly vulnerable to such disruptions.



At the same time, Japan's most significant domestic challenge remains its declining birthrate.



Behind falling fertility rates lie deep structural issues including economic insecurity, rising educational costs, excessive working hours, and the overconcentration of population in major metropolitan areas. Addressing these problems requires comprehensive long-term policies such as tax reductions for younger generations, expanded childcare support, labor reform, tuition-free education, and regional decentralization.

It is also important to observe the institutional differences between Japan and Thailand, particularly regarding parliamentary and electoral systems.

Japan operates under a stable parliamentary cabinet system with a bicameral legislature consisting of the House of Representatives and the House of Councillors. This structure enables long-term policy continuity and political stability. However, entrenched interests and institutional rigidity can also slow the pace of reform.

Thailand, by contrast, functions as a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary system, yet it has experienced periods of military rule and significant political fluctuation. Although institutional stability remains an ongoing challenge, Thailand simultaneously possesses greater flexibility for dynamic policy shifts and rapid economic adaptation.

In essence, Japan may be described as “a stable nation with slow structural change,” while Thailand represents “a nation of volatility, yet with substantial growth potential.”

The famous Reclining Buddha



The famous Reclining Buddha of Thailand embodies another dimension of the country’s spiritual identity. The Reclining Buddha represents the final moments before the Buddha enters Nirvana. Lying peacefully on his right side, the figure symbolizes enlightenment,

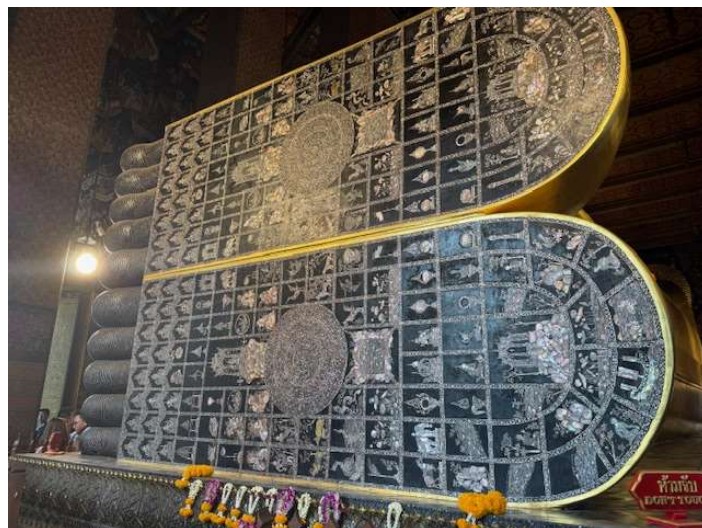
serenity, and liberation from worldly suffering.

Thailand, as a predominantly Theravada Buddhist nation, contains countless temples and sacred Buddhist images, among which the Reclining Buddha holds particular significance. Most famous is the monumental Reclining Buddha housed within Wat Pho in Bangkok. Measuring approximately 46 meters in length and 15 meters in height, the statue is covered in radiant gold leaf. The soles of its feet are intricately decorated with mother-of-pearl inlays depicting auspicious Buddhist symbols.

Wat Pho itself is one of Thailand's oldest temples and is also widely recognized as the birthplace of traditional Thai massage. Consequently, it possesses significance not only as a religious institution but also as one of Thailand's most important cultural landmarks.

The Reclining Buddha is far more than an enormous statue.

Embedded within it is the Buddhist understanding that death is not an end, but a transition toward enlightenment itself. The serene expression of the reclining figure quietly invites reflection upon impermanence, peace of mind, and the nature of existence.



The differences between Japan and Thailand also emerge clearly in the realm of **entrepreneurial spirit**.

According to international comparisons such as the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), the percentage of adults expressing entrepreneurial intention in Japan remains around 5 percent, whereas Thailand records approximately 20 to 30 percent — a substantial gap.

Similarly, within the Total Early-stage Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA) Index, Japan consistently ranks at relatively low levels, while Thailand maintains comparatively strong performance among emerging economies.

This difference reflects not only institutional structures but also cultural attitudes toward risk.

In Japan, the social cost of failure remains high, reinforcing strong preferences for stability and security. In Thailand, by contrast, barriers to entry for small businesses and self-employment are comparatively low, making entrepreneurial challenge a more natural component of everyday life.

As a result, a striking contrast emerges: Japan faces tendencies toward stagnation associated with maturity, while Thailand retains considerable room for growth driven by challenge and adaptability.





These differences in systems and mindset significantly influence economic development and broader social structures.

The “jewels” discovered during this journey were not material possessions.

Rather, they were the gentleness of the people, disciplined ways of life, the power of food, healing traditions, and the energy of a growing economy. All of these are values refined and polished over time.

Thailand stands as a living intersection of health, culture, economics, institutions, and human ambition.

And the transformations unfolding there quietly pose important questions to Japan itself.

Change does not exist somewhere far away.

It is already progressing within the reality surrounding us.

The Chao Phraya River



The Chao Phraya River flows through central Thailand from north to south and is often referred to as “the Mother River of Thailand.”

The development of Bangkok has always been deeply connected to this river, which historically served as a central artery for transportation, commerce, and logistics.

Numerous iconic temples and historical landmarks stand along its banks, including Wat Pho, renowned for its Reclining Buddha, Wat Arun with its magnificent central spire, and the Grand Palace itself.



Even today, riverboats and tourist cruises continue to operate along the Chao Phraya, functioning not only as transportation for local residents but also as one of Bangkok’s defining attractions. At night, illuminated temples and modern skyscrapers create one of the city’s most iconic urban landscapes.

Incidentally, the name “Chao Phraya” was originally not a geographic term, but a noble title granted to high-ranking aristocrats in Thailand. The phrase carries the meaning of “great river,” revealing the profound importance this waterway holds within Thai society.

Bangkok was once known as the “Venice of the East” due to the extensive network of canals, or khlongs, branching from the Chao Phraya River. In earlier eras, boats served as primary transportation throughout the city. Although modern roads now dominate urban movement, traces of that aquatic civilization still remain in floating markets and river ferries today.

I, [Tatsuya Okamura](#), have always possessed a deep affection for rivers and the sea.



Dinner Time

Bangkok, the capital of **Thailand**, covers an area of approximately 1,569 square kilometers and has a population of roughly 5.5 million people.

Bangkok's seafood cuisine is characterized by Thailand's distinctive balance of sweetness, sourness, spiciness, and saltiness. Fresh seafood is combined with herbs and spices to create dishes rich in aroma, complexity, and intensity.

Although Bangkok itself is an inland city, its proximity to the Gulf of Thailand allows seafood from ports across the nation to flow into the capital in abundance. Shrimp, crab,

squid, and shellfish are all widely enjoyed, with river prawns and blue swimming crabs particularly prized.



Among Thailand's most famous seafood dishes is Tom Yum Goong — a hot and sour shrimp soup infused with lemongrass, kaffir lime leaves, and chili peppers.

Another iconic dish is Pu Pad Pong Curry, featuring stir-fried crab prepared with curry powder and egg, combining richness with layered spice.

Thai seafood cuisine also relies heavily upon fish sauce, cilantro, and lime, all of which enhance the natural umami of seafood while creating a refreshing finish.



In Bangkok, seafood is not confined to luxury restaurants alone. Street stalls and local markets also serve charcoal-grilled prawns, squid, and spicy seafood salads at remarkably accessible prices, making culinary exploration an essential aspect of the city's cultural identity.



The journey continues...



Ayutthaya



In **Ayutthaya**, history and silence reign together.

Even the ruins themselves maintain a profound sense of harmony, embodying what may be described as “health through simplification.” In an age overwhelmed by information, moments of emptiness may ultimately become the greatest form of medicine.



Ayutthaya was once the capital of the Ayutthaya Kingdom and remains one of Thailand’s most historically significant cities. Founded in 1351 by **King U-Thong** (Ramathibodi I), it prospered for approximately four centuries as the political, economic, and religious center of Siam.

Located within the Chao Phraya River basin, Ayutthaya flourished through international maritime trade. From the 15th through 17th centuries, merchants and diplomats from China, Japan, and Europe regularly visited the kingdom. A Japanese settlement even existed within the city, where figures such as Yamada Nagamasa became historically prominent. Although temporarily occupied by Burmese forces in 1569, Ayutthaya later regained independence under King Naresuan. During the reign of King Narai in the late 17th

century, diplomatic relations with Western nations, including France, expanded significantly, marking the kingdom's golden age.

However, in 1767, Ayutthaya suffered catastrophic destruction during a second large-scale Burmese invasion. Palaces, temples, and countless Buddhist statues were burned or destroyed. Following the collapse of the kingdom, Thailand's political center shifted first to Thonburi and eventually to modern-day Bangkok.

Today, Ayutthaya preserves many temple ruins and ancient stupas that testify to its former magnificence. Recognized for its immense historical value, the Ayutthaya Historical Park was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1991.

It now stands as one of Thailand's most important destinations for understanding Thai history and Buddhist civilization.



Thai Ingredients





There is a quiet happiness in spending time slowly while drinking Tokowaka no Megumi®.



As I reflected, I realized that my “management mind” had become somewhat dulled, making meditation essential once again.

In business, what matters most is not merely how one works, but toward whom one directs that work.



As a management philosophy-oriented entrepreneur, I, [Tatsuya Okamura](#), always maintain clear priorities:

1. Customers
2. Business partners
3. Staff members
4. Families of staff members
5. Local communities and municipalities
6. Nation and international society
7. Shareholders

There must be no deviation from this order.

If these priorities are not mistaken, true failure becomes unlikely.

Thereafter, success — whether modest or great — can be accumulated simply through thorough execution of ordinary principles in the proper sequence, carried out with both boldness and precision.

It is remarkably simple, and yet profoundly difficult.

Visiting the home of a friend managing a company in Thailand.



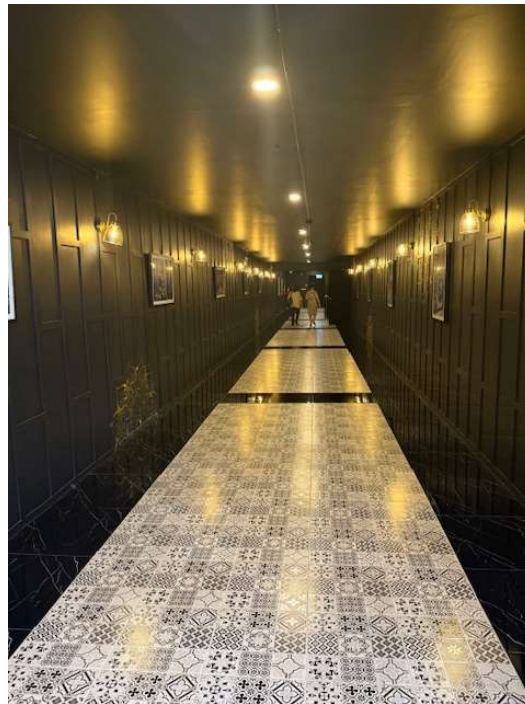
A local restaurant.



Thai souvenirs.



Traditional dance.



By immersing myself deeply in Thai society through the four perspectives of **history**, **health**, **food culture**, and **economics**, I came to recognize the extraordinary depth and multilayered complexity of the nation — dimensions impossible to grasp through short-term tourism alone.

What existed there was not merely a destination for visitors, but a country truly lived within.

Most striking within the realm of **historical culture** was the overwhelming spirituality embedded throughout Bangkok's religious spaces.

The golden temples and royal palaces were not merely architectural structures; they revealed a city fundamentally shaped by faith itself.

The immense Reclining Buddha at Wat Pho radiated an almost sacred stillness, embodying the Buddhist ideals of ultimate peace and enlightenment.

Meanwhile, within the ancient city of Ayutthaya, the remnants of a once-glorious trading kingdom remained quietly preserved. The scars left by the destruction of 1767 created a profound contrast between prosperity and impermanence.

Within the sphere of **wellness culture**, traditional Thai massage stood out not simply as relaxation therapy, but as an integrated aspect of everyday life.

Its seamless presence within urban living reflected an Eastern philosophy emphasizing harmony between body and spirit, giving the impression that daily life itself moved according to a carefully tuned rhythm.

Thai cuisine likewise revealed remarkable sophistication.

The layered interplay of herbs and spices created extraordinarily complex flavors. Seafood dishes such as Tom Yum Goong and Pu Pad Pong Curry demonstrated a refined balance of spiciness, acidity, sweetness, and salinity — culinary experiences approaching artistic expression.

The maturity of Bangkok's street food culture was equally impressive, transforming ordinary urban spaces into vibrant centers of everyday gastronomy and social interaction.

Economically, Bangkok's urban development offered perhaps the clearest symbol of Thailand's transformation.

Towering glass-and-steel skyscrapers coexist alongside traditional markets and riverside communities, creating a multilayered cityscape in which different historical eras overlap simultaneously.

Foreign investment and rapid infrastructure development have firmly established Bangkok

as one of Southeast Asia's major economic hubs, while social disparities accompanying urban expansion remain visible realities beneath the surface of growth.

Ultimately, this journey was far more than a travel experience.

It became a profound immersion into an urban civilization where history, religion, daily life, and economics exist as a unified whole.

Thailand left a powerful impression as a rare nation in which past and present coexist quietly together — combining refined urban sophistication with unmistakable human warmth.

