

Good Things Brewing

Discovering some gems amongst the city's café cornucopia

By **Micaela Marini Higgs**

It's easy to get a coffee in Bangkok. Walk down any soi and you can almost always find a Starbucks, a photogenic café, or stall serving *kafe boran* strained through a sock. But finding a really good coffee? That can be a little more difficult.

Thankfully, each year we get a few more options in this town. With a growing focus on Thai beans, more and more cafés around the city have begun priding themselves on their selections from local roasters, and their range of international options. At the same time, baristas seem to be getting a bit friendlier. Sure, you can still find someone looking very serious as they use a complicated procedure to make an average coffee, but why bother when there are so many brewers eager to chat about their menus and drinks? If you're hoping to have a great coffee and a conversation with someone who knows their stuff, here are our top picks for places you might not have had a chance to try yet but definitely should. From malls to shipping containers, these are the six places we keep returning to.

EKKAMAI MACCHIATO

In a cozy house with white walls and wood floors, **Ekkamai Macchiato** (6/2, Ekkamai Soi 12) attracts customers with its quality coffee and stylish setting. While you're sure to see a few people who've come here for the sole purpose of taking Instagram shots in this minimalistic café, others have been drawn here by the menu, which offers B100 coffees, sourced from local roaster **Bottomless**.

With two blends to choose from, the Thai, Brazilian, and Ethiopian mix is fruity and recommended for hot drinks. Order it either as an espresso, smooth and strong, or in a cappuccino, dense and rich. The Thai, Colombian, and Guatemalan blend, which they use primarily in iced drinks, has a strong chocolate and nutty flavour, making for a satisfying iced latte. If you want to be really indulgent and upgrade your drink, the adult Affogato (B180) makes great use of this latter blend, combining it with Grand Marnier and chocolate ice cream. The drink perfectly balances these complimentary flavours, the suggestive hint of orange and the nuttiness of the coffee cutting through the richness of the



ice cream to keep it from being overly sweet. With its cute décor and generous selection, this café offers something for Instagrammers and coffee lovers alike.

Open Monday and Wednesday to Friday from 8am to 6pm, Tuesday from 8am to 4pm, and Saturday and Sunday from 9am to 6pm.

KAIZEN

Narrow, and fitted out totally in white, **Kaizen** (582/5, Tai Ping Tower) was opened two years ago with the intention of bringing serious coffee to Bangkok. In this café in the north end of Ekkamai you'll find a crowd of caffeine lovers seated at tables along a single bench facing the counter, with a spiral staircase leading to more seating upstairs. Though prices are high compared to others in the area, they're definitely justified given the quality of the drinks and the variety of the menu.

Check the board next to the counter to find a list of the current beans and blends available. As you're reading, it's likely a barista will swoop in to ask questions about what you like and suggest options, along with different brew methods for each bean. If there are too many customers for personalized help, the menu includes tasting notes and suggestions to assist you in navigating all of the available options. We'd recommend checking the board to see what kind of 18-hour nitro-cold brew (B150) is on tap. If you want to stick with classics, try the house blend, *New Horizons*, with an espresso (B100) or flat white (B120) for an intensely floral and fruity flavour. You can even buy a 250-gram bag to take home for just B675.

Open daily from 8am to 6pm.

GRIND SIZE

With turquoise walls and stylish murals, this Bangkok newcomer's distinctive look and personality set it apart from the chic-industrial décor favoured by most of the city's coffee shops. With quality coffee, complimentary butterfly pea tea, and a classic brunch menu, **Grind Size** (Shinsen Fish Market, Sukhumvit Soi 39) makes for a great place to catch up with friends.

Featuring two blends from Thai micro-roasters based in Bangkok and Chiang Mai, information about each can be found written on the wall and window, and the staff is happy to talk through the menu and make recommendations based on your preferences. The *BKK*



Getting the perfect pour at Kaizen



Above: Grind Size; Below: Sarnie's

Blend is made using beans from Thailand, Laos, Brazil, Indonesia, and El Salvador, and has a non-acidic chocolate flavour that compliments cold beverages. Try it in the iced latte (B100), where the nutty blend adds lightness to the milkiness of the drink. The *CNX Blend* is made just using beans from Thailand and Brazil, and has a far fruitier flavour, making it an excellent choice for hot espresso drinks like the flat white (B100) where the sweetness of the coffee creates a satisfying balance of flavours. If you prefer black coffee, you can't go wrong with their house brew (Thai beans B120, International B160). When you're done, enjoy a glass of their complimentary butterfly pea tea.

Open Monday to Friday from 8am to 6pm, and Saturday to Sunday from 8am to 8pm.

SARNIES

The team behind one of Singapore's hippest coffee roasters have made their way to Bangkok, joining a garden shared by tropical bar Coastal and Thai restaurant Kram, located in the residential area north of Phrom Phong. Occupying two shipping containers fitted with large windows, **Sarnies** (113 Phop Mit Alley) is currently focused on wholesale distribution and creating custom roasts for cafes across town.

One container holds their roasting set-up, the other the café—a single counter flanked by seven seats. Though you're literally rubbing elbows with other customers, the windows and garden setting keep the space from feeling claustrophobic. The atmosphere is laid-back and jovial, making this the sort of place you can visit alone and trust you'll make a few new friends.



Strike up a conversation with the barista and make sure to ask about off-the-menu options. Since Sarnies roasts their own coffee, and they are constantly testing out different blends and flavour profiles, there's always the opportunity to order something new. One drink worth trying that you won't find on their menu is the Orange Mocha (B140), a rich and subtly citrusy coffee blend made by infusing fresh orange zest with homemade chocolate syrup. Another excellent option is their cold drip coffee (B100), which varies daily and is a constant source of experimentation. When we visited the Thai, El Salvadorian, and Ethiopian blend made for a refreshingly clean and nutty flavour. With a wide selection of filter coffees (B150) from around the world, serious coffee lovers are sure to find their perfect brew.

Open Thursdays and Fridays from 9am to 5pm.



Sarnie's



Siwilai Café

SIWILAI CAFÉ

A mall isn't the usual venue for high-quality coffee, but thanks to its location **Siwilai Café** (5F Central Embassy, 1031 Ploenchit Rd) is one of the rare cafés in Bangkok with a view—from their balcony you can look out over the lush neighbourhood surrounding the British embassy. With minimalist wood furniture, a sleek marble coffee bar, and quiet mood music, Siwilai is much more relaxed and comfortable than the retail spaces that surround it, making it an easy place to come and spend an afternoon.

Using a Thai-Brazilian medium roast from **Pacamara Coffee Roasters**, the coffee here is bold and flavourful. The Piccolo Latte (B110) pleasantly showcases the acidity of the coffee, while in their cappuccino (B120) the flavour is slightly more subdued. Beyond their espresso offerings, the citrusy Cold Brew (B120) offers an entirely unique take on 12-hour brewed coffee by infusing it with lime and lemon, serving it with a tangerine wedge in the glass. The flavours come in waves, the lime adding a fresh zest that heightens the citrus flavours, creating an unexpected compliment to the coffee. In the Black & Nuts (B140) you'll find a classic mix of flavours, with black coffee, peanut butter milk, and cream topped with toasted peanuts. The taste of the blend isn't coffee-forward, but the peanut butter milk is subtle enough that the coffee does add a slight sweetness that makes the mix surprisingly refreshing. Order one of their freshly baked desserts or take advantage of their promotion



Some Time Blue

running through the end of October to get a free cookie when you post a photo of your coffee on social media.

Open daily from 10am to 8pm.

SOME TIME BLUE

Located in the residential side of Ari, **Some Time Blue** (Soi Phaholyothin 2) is the newest venture by **Sutida Srirungthum**, the winner of the National Thailand Brewers Cup in 2016 and the previous face of **Sutdrip**. The interior is Victorian-inspired décor, with heavy furniture pieces such as marble-topped tables and mismatched upholstered wood chairs, but modern accents sprinkled throughout the space keep it from feeling overly stuffy. Large windows balance out the café's muted lighting, making the cozy space a comfortable spot to enjoy some of the city's best coffee and a book.

An expertly pulled espresso shot (B55) is a great start, but if you're hoping to experiment more, try something from their extensive hot drip menu, which offers a range of roasts and international beans along with tasting notes. Our favourite was the Ethiopian (B180), which was slightly acidic and sweet. Even though they're excellent, these drinks are easily overshadowed by the Gravity Latte (B90), a deceptively simple-sounding cold latte served without ice, and if you can only order one thing make it this. Phenomenally smooth and silky, the drink is dense and creamy, the coffee bursting with a natural sweetness and richness that makes for an unexpectedly decadent flavour. Enjoy your brew of choice with one of their freshly baked tarts or cakes.

Open weekdays from 9am to 7pm, Saturday from 10:30am to 9pm, and Sunday from 10:30am to 7pm. ■