THAILAND
TRAITS and TREASURES
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Preface

One of the many countries with distinctive traits, Thailand is one endowed with a rich heritage of art and culture resulting from the accumulation of endless evolutions and development. Historical evidence further reflects its wisdom, aesthetics, environs and other symbols that together form the identity of the Thai nation. Hence, the valuable treasures in this cradle of civilization should be preserved, continued, studied and disseminated to foster more profound and accurate understanding.

On behalf of the special sub-committee for the publication of *Thailand : Traits and Treasures*, I would like to express our appreciation to the National Identity Board for giving us the opportunity to research and write about some outstanding aspects of Thai society in the regions and communities so that those unfamiliar with and interested in Thailand would have greater knowledge and understanding of our country. I would also like to thank my colleagues on the sub-committee for their hard work and inputs which have significantly contributed to this publication. Special thanks go to the Tourism Authority of Thailand for providing funding support for part of the expense in the publication of *Thailand : Traits and Treasures*.

The special sub-committee hopes that this book will render both knowledge and pleasure to the readers.

(Dr Suvit Yodman)  
Chairperson of the special sub-committee for the publication of *Thailand : Traits and Treasures* under the National Identity Board
Archaeology and History

What is now Thailand has been home to a number of ethnic groups since the dawn of human history. Prehistoric stone implements dating back to the Paleolithic Period have been found in many parts of Thailand. A recent discovery of Homo erectus skull cap fragments in the north puts the dates of human history in the country back to the period between 1.6-0.5 million years. Evidence of settled village life was also discovered in many areas totalling half the size of the country. Artefacts made by the people in this period include implements made of stone, wood, bone, and shell to serve various specific functions. Rock art exists in a number of cave sites in all parts of the country. Many rock paintings depict very clearly the ways of life of settled village people with scenes like wet rice cultivation, cattle-herding, a man leading an ox by rope, and dog-handling.

By about 2000-1800 B.C. bronze appeared in common use. With tin and copper deposits, Thailand was probably one of the few places where both minerals could be collected. Copper mining sites in Northeast and Central Thailand have engaged archaeologists in a project on archaeo-metallurgy for more than ten years. Successive excavations reveal large-scale copper smelting industries, with tons of slags and ingot moulds, and many burials associated with metal artefact offerings. Iron came into use relatively early, too. It first appeared with bronze in the same artefact: a bi-metallic spearhead has its blade made of iron with a bronze socketed handle. A number of iron bracelets were found wrapped around bracelets made of bronze. By 500 B.C. - 200 A.D. contacts with India and China were increased, as attested by trade goods such as etched beads, glass ceramics, as well as other objects made of metal with motifs indicative of foreign origins. Chinese records mentioned the existence of many towns and cities from the 3rd century A.D. onwards. Some urban societies rose to their peaks in the 7th century A.D.
The Thais did not settle in Southeast Asia until towards the end of the first millennium A.D. Sukhothai was founded around 1220 A.D\(^1\), in northern Thailand. Its third ruler, King Ramkhamhaeng (1279-1298) invented Thai script, for the first time, in 1283. This prosperous city and kingdom was ruled by a benevolent paternal monarch, or ‘father-king,’ in contrast to the ‘god-king’ of contemporary Angkor in Cambodia. Sukhothai culture, its people, and way of life were based very much on Buddhism, as was another contemporary kingdom known as Lan Na, situated further north. Sukhothai lasted about 160 years, falling under the domination of Ayutthaya in 1378. Buddhist art of the Sukhothai Period remains a distinguished classic style in Thai history.

\(^1\) All historical data, i.e. years and centuries, refer to the chronology of the Western Calendar.

Ayutthaya, founded in 1350 A.D., was a very powerful state. The regime adopted the Khmer model of ‘God-King’ in administering royal affairs. Its 417 years in power left unmatched records in world history as the only state in Southeast Asia open to international trade and diplomacy with almost any country that came into contact, including those of Europeans. French records related in detail the friendship
between King Louis XIV of France and King Narai of Ayutthaya in the 17th century. Ayutthaya was united and militarily strong, capable not only of defending itself from outside attacks, but also, from time to time, able to expand its sovereignty into neighbouring countries, some of which became vassals of Ayutthaya, for some time. However, Ayutthaya fell to the military power of Myanmar in 1767.

Taksin, a general who escaped from the city with some followers, rallied Thai forces to repulse Myanmar and become king, setting up a new capital at Thon Buri in 1768. The present Royal House of Chakri was founded by one of Taksin’s generals, who established Bangkok in 1782 and became King Rama I. Under his rule the former territory of Ayutthaya was regained.

In the 19th century, foreign contacts were increased. The first Thai recognition of Western power in the region was the Treaty of Amity and Commerce between Thailand and the United Kingdom in 1826. In 1833, the United States began diplomatic exchanges with Siam (as Thailand was called until July 1939). However, it was during the later reigns of King Rama IV (1851-1868), and his son, King Rama V (1868-1910), that Thailand attained firm rapprochement with Western powers. Through the diplomatic skills of these monarchs, combined with the modernizing reforms of the Thai government, Siam emerged as the only country in South and Southeast Asia to avoid European colonization. Under the reign of these two Thai kings, the Kingdom of Siam underwent rapid modernization. A new financial system was introduced and post, telegraphic and railway communications were established. Irrigation was developed in the central plain, resulting in the production of a large rice surplus. The system of justice was remodelled as the government reorganised. The absolute monarchy continued until the bloodless coup of 1932 converted Thailand into a constitutional monarchy. Despite the removal of political power, the monarchy still retains the love and loyalty of the Thai people.

The present king, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, has engaged himself in more than 3,000 ‘royal development projects’ so far, since his accession to the throne in 1946.
The Thai Monarchy
The Thai Monarchy

The Thai people have an invaluable cultural heritage that their forefathers had diligently created and maintained for posterity to be proud of. This cultural heritage stands out as the unique identity of an ancient nation. Above all, it is the Thai monarchy that has bestowed great benevolence on the country, the heritage of pride and dignity that all Thais are aware of.

The characteristics of the Thai monarchy have undergone various changes during the passage of time. In the early stages, there were many independent Thai dominions and the Thais had to fight among rival groups and against outside enemies. Thus, Thai monarchs in those days were mostly warrior kings.

After a long period of fighting and migrating, the Thais finally settled down in the area which is now Thailand. Sukhothai, the first capital of the Thai Kingdom, was established. Though only a part of the North in present-day Thailand, Sukhothai became extremely important historically and politically. Sukhothai was the centre of commerce and Buddhism. Befitting the literal meaning of its name, “The Dawn of Happiness,” the peaceful nature of the city was reflected in the image of its kings, especially King Ramkhamhaeng the Great who ruled his subjects like a father does his children. The King had a bell hung up in front of the palace for anyone in plight to ring and their case would be heard and dealt with fairly by the King himself. King Ramkhamhaeng also established friendly relations with China and other neighbouring kingdoms, thereby ensuring the country’s stability. He was also credited with inventing the Thai alphabet in the year 12831. As for religion, he had invited Buddhist monks of the Lankawongs tenet from Nakhon Si Thammarat to stay at Sukhothai. Under his reign, Sukhothai flourished in almost every area.

In the Ayutthaya Period (1350-1767) King Naresuan the Great was the epitome of valour. As Crown

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1 All historical data, i.e. years and centuries, refer to the chronology of the Western Calendar.
Prince, Naresuan relieved the Ayutthaya Kingdom from the acute threat of hostile occupation posed by a foreign power, in 1574. Since then he had fought many battles, the most famous one being the single combat on elephant back against the Burmese Crown Prince, in which King Naresuan was victorious.

Another renowned king of the Ayutthaya Period was King Narai the Great who, at the beginning of his reign, put down rebellious members of the court. His wise handling of officials resulted in efficient management of state affairs. His diplomacy in establishing friendly relations with Western countries, especially France, raised the status of Siam in the eyes of Westerners. Two emissaries were sent to France. The first one was lost at sea but the second one was received with splendours by King Louis XIV since it was the first time an Eastern monarch had sent an ambassador to the French Court. The French king eventually sent 636 soldiers to serve in the Thai king’s service. Though a devout Buddhist, King Narai allowed Jesuit missionaries to preach their religion in Siam and Thai who wished to convert to Christianity were allowed to do so. The King even bestowed land on which the Jesuit priests could build a church and schools. Contact with Westerners brought modern knowledge and technology, especially in the areas of medicine, astronomy, architecture, and military training. In the compounds of King Narai’s Palace at Lop Buri, the second capital city, the king had a pipeline and fountains installed, and at Yen Villa an observatory was built from which the king could observe lunar and solar eclipses.

In the Thon Buri Period (1767-1782) King Tak Sin the Great was another warrior king who managed to put down rivalling factions and re-establish the kingdom, after the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767.

In the Rattanakosin Period (since 1782), King Rama I, founder of the Royal House of Chakri, established Bangkok as the new capital city on the east bank of the Chao Phraya River, opposite Thon Buri. After a series of warfare, the country was in peace and the King found time to turn to producing literary works. Subsequent Chakri monarchs had
all contributed to the progress and happiness of the country. King Rama IV, better known in the West as King Mongkut, was a scholar. He was well-versed in various fields, especially astronomy, since he was able to predict a total solar eclipse accurately. He could speak and write English and once wrote a letter to US President James C. Buchanan offering some elephants to be used in warfare. The King assigned an Englishwoman, Mrs. Anna T. Leonowens, to teach English to the royal children, notably Prince Chulalongkorn, at the royal court.

Prince Chulalongkorn succeeded his father as King Chulalongkorn or Rama V. It was in his reign that Siam underwent extensive modernization. Ascending the throne at the tender age of 15, the king faced many problems, domestic and foreign, which he dealt with very efficiently. The king sent a number of his sons to be educated in Europe so that they would return to help develop the country. He was the first Thai king to make state visits to European heads of state. The King’s meeting with Czar Nicholas II of Russia was a splendid move of diplomacy since it kept England and France from colonizing Siam. King Chulalongkorn always saw to the welfare of his subjects, sometimes visiting them incognito to observe their circumstances. He was a superb writer and poet as well, but his greatest achievement was the abolition of slavery, a gradual and bloodless process that has earned him the appellation of “Phra Piya Maharat,” or the Great Beloved King.

His successor, King Rama VI, who received his education at Oxford University, held the rank of general, First Battalion, Durham Light Infantry, an honorary rank bestowed on him by King George V of Great Britain. He was an accomplished scholar who had produced prolific writings in various genres, in both Thai and English. Besides writing plays, he also acted in performances. A superb translator, his rendition of Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* is part of Thailand’s school curriculum. *The War of the Polish Succession*, a historical novel written in English, attests to his mastery of the English language. The king had a model town called “Dusit Thani”
The Nine Kings of the Royal House of Chakri

King Rama I  King Rama II  King Rama III

King Rama IV  King Rama V  King Rama VI

King Rama VII  King Rama VIII  King Rama IX
constructed as a means to gradually prepare the Thai people for democracy. His decision to join the Entente Cordiale and declare war on Germany and Austria - Hungary in World War I was an ingenious move that helped maintain the sovereignty of Thailand. For the first time Thai soldiers marched proudly through the Arc de Triomphe in Paris alongside the other allied troops. A legacy left by King Rama VI is Chulalongkorn University, the oldest institution of higher learning in Thailand, built in commemoration of his royal father.

King Rama VII, also a son of King Chulalongkorn, was the last king of the absolute monarchy when the bloodless coup of 1932 changed the system of government to the constitutional monarchy. Actually, the king had already planned to relinquish his power to the Thai people. He bestowed the first Constitution on the country, and it is more than apt for him to be designated “The Father of Democracy.”

The present monarch, King Bhumibol Adulyadej, Rama IX, has been revered for sacrificing everything for his people. Apart from being the longest reigning monarch in the world, His Majesty is perhaps one of the hardest working heads of state. All through the 60 years on the throne, his activities have covered not only affairs of state, but also activities in diverse fields. His numerous development projects, philosophy of Sufficiency Economy, and New Theory not only bear direct benefit on the Thai people but can also be applied worldwide. The Artificial Rain Project and the Chaiapattana Aerator are examples of his initiative and invention that prove useful in agriculture and the conservation of the environment. All these contributions are encapsulated in His Majesty’s name, “Bhumibol,” which means “Strength of the Land.”

The remark made by King Rama I that “Siam has a common father, the king, who possesses the Ten Kingly Virtues. He possesses morality, ability, bravery, and knowledge as his great assets, and never scorns any people of foreign origins or races that have come to be under his bounty, in all periods and eras, for they all are Siamese, who are equal, regardless of race, and take pride in their country” has proved to be true. Therefore, the Thai people should maintain this august institution, since the monarchy most succinctly constitutes the national identity.
The Thai people believe that Phra Sayam Thewathirat is a Deva-guardian, or supreme deity, who perpetually safeguards the Nation, the King and the Royal Family. The term was first used by King Rama IV (1851-1868) who realized that Thailand must have long had a Deva-guardian to protect her from all kinds of threat and calamity, thereby ensuring her survival, especially from Western colonialism which, in the end successfully brought all of Thailand’s neighbours under its control. In this regard, as a measure of the far-sightedness and prescience of Thai kings, King Rama III (1824-1851) warned his most senior officials near the end of his reign to start preparing the country against threats from the Western powers, stating that in the future there would no longer be any serious warfare with neighbouring countries, but only conflicts with the West, a prognosis that proved to be remarkably accurate.

As a result of this belief in the existence of a benevolent Deva-guardian, King Rama IV commissioned Prince Pradit Worakarn, to create a
Statuette to give concrete expression to the idea and to provide an object for continuing worship and reverence, so that the Deva would protect the Nation and assure its prosperity, forever. Phra Sayam Thewathirat is an 8-inch high standing Deva image cast in gold, with the right hand holding a sword, and the left hand raised to the chest in a posture of blessing. The statuette was first placed in the Song Tham Throne Hall, where King Rama IV as well as successive kings after him would, by tradition, pay homage and present offerings of food and other worship items daily. The image has since been moved to the Phaisan Thaksin Throne Hall and set on a carved sandalwood base, having a design of a swan and dragon in front of a plaque with the words “The Abode of Phra Sayam Thewathirat” inscribed, where the figure remains to this day.

At present, the ceremonial offerings are performed twice a week, on Tuesdays and Saturdays. It is an ancient Thai belief that these two days are auspicious for holding ceremonies connected with all kinds of arms. Phra Sayam Thewathirat symbolizes a defensive weapon protecting the Nation and the Royal House of Chakri. An important offering-ceremony is also held on Thai New Year’s Day, or Songkran, which is celebrated on 13 April. Thus, the ceremonies are seen as a symbolic enhancement of the power and sacredness of the Deva.

In 1982, the year commemorating the Bangkok Bicentennial as the capital city. The image of Phra Sayam Thewathirat was brought out to the Dusit Throne Hall for the people to view and pay homage for the first time. Each time, the courtyard of the Throne Hall overflows daily with a constant stream of people vying to be in the presence of one of the most venerated images of the land.
The National Symbols of Thailand

The Thai Elephant

Thailand’s best-known national symbol, the elephant, has been associated with the Thai people for centuries. The Asiatic species found in Thailand, *Elephas maximus*, was used for heavy work and was a vehicle of war in Thailand up until the 16th Century. One of Thailand’s most famous rulers, King Mongkut (officially, King Rama IV, 1851-1868) once offered some elephants to US President James Buchanan (1857-1861), praising their usefulness for heavy work.

Thailand had an elephant flag from the reign of King Rama II (1809-1824), depicting a white elephant on a red background. Thais who adopted many Hindu beliefs and rituals in daily and royal life, regard white elephants as auspicious, perhaps owing to their rarity.

Though the elephant’s role in modern Thai society has diminished, Thais continue to treat them with great respect. A Thai Elephant Conservation Centre was set up in 1969 in Lampang to care for young elephants and train their mahouts. March 13th has now been designated Elephant Day by the Royal Thai Government, which joins with non-government organisations to celebrate this noble animal and raise funds, and heighten public awareness of elephant conservation activities.

Ratchaphruet

The national flower/tree, *Ratchaphruet* (*Cassia fistula Linn.*), known by several names, including the Pudding Piper Tree or Indian Laburnum, is a deciduous tree that grows to a height of 8-15 metres. Its yellow flowers grow in clusters close to its limbs and branches, and its cylindrical pods grow from 20-60 centimetres long.
The Ratchaphruek is a native of the Asian tropics and is found in mixed deciduous forests. It blooms from February to May and grows leaves prior to flowering.

The Thais consider it an auspicious tree, as its roots, bark, leaves and pods are of medicinal use for both humans and elephants. The bark and wood are used to tan leather. The golden red, hard wood is used for making pillars, cart wheels, and plough handles.

The people of Bueng Kaen Nakhon in the Northeast hold a festival called the Dok Khun Siang Khaen Festival from 13-15 April annually while the tree is in bloom. Dok Khun is the colloquial name for the Ratchaphruek.

The Thai Pavilion

With its graceful curves and classical form, the Thai Sala, or open pavilion, is an easily recognisable symbol of Thai architecture. The Sala is a type of rest shelter found in temples, private homes and alongside major highways and canals. The rectangular building usually has four wooden or brick pillars and a very steep roof.

The roof of the Thai pavilion has especially wide eaves that provide shade from the sun and shelter from the rain. As it now commonly is fitted with bench seats around three sides, it is important that the shade cover the persons sitting inside.

While modern Thai pavilions tend to be plain, those inside monasteries or royal palaces may be elaborately decorated. The gables at either end are embellished with carvings and gilded, with a glass mosaic in the background. The finials are decorated with horn-like ends, while the triangular gable is often topped by a representation of a Naga, a mythical serpent.
The Royal Ceremonies to Celebrate H. M. the King’s Birthday Anniversary
The Royal Ceremonies in Celebration of H. M. the King’s Birthday Anniversary

In the past, Thailand did not have any distinct royal ceremonies to celebrate the monarch’s birthday anniversary, as is practised nowadays because Thai people held the belief that they must not let anybody know the date and time of their birth, as such revelation might pose a threat or bring bad luck to them. It was, hence, of vital importance especially to the reigning monarch as the pre-eminent royal head of the country, not to allow anybody to get to know the exact time when he was born. By tradition, the corresponding coordinates were and still are recorded in a person’s individual chart of astrological constellation at birth (duang chata rasi) that is kept confidential, even treated as a secret.

More recently in history, during the Third Reign of the Royal House of Chakri, King Rama III (1824-1851) had annually one Buddha image cast to commemorate each year of his reign. Yet that ceremonial marking of the progression of the Third Reign did not reveal the year, month, date and hour of the ruler’s birth.

The royal ceremony on the King’s birthday anniversary was initiated in the reign of King Rama IV (1851-1868), earlier ordained into the monkhood, and upheld upon his accession to the throne as the fourth ruler of the Royal House of Chakri. Two events marked the celebration of the King’s birthday anniversary. They are the ceremony to pay respect to the Buddha image and the merit-making at both the Royal Palace and at the temple known as Wat Phra Si Rattana Satsadaram.

During the present reign, yearly a series of ceremonies commemorates this occasion, from 3-6 December.

On the first day, 3 December, H.M. the King proceeds to review
the trooping the colours and the taking of the oath, receiving pledges of loyalty and honesty by the royal guards. On 4 December, at Sala Dusitalai in the Dusit Royal Palace, the King grants an audience to groups of people representing a cross-section of the entire society, who come to offer their birthday wishes. On 5 December, the King’s birthday anniversary, the most important royal ceremonies evolve. In the morning, the King proceeds to the Amarin Winichai Throne Hall in the Grand Palace to receive in audience the members of the Royal Family and subjects as well as government officials, while soldiers fire salutes in his honour. In the afternoon, the King graciously bestows titles to some high-ranking Buddhist monks before listening to the citing of Buddhist sermons. In addition, the King grants an audience to Chinese and Annamite monks at Wat Phra Si Rattana Satsadaram, to receive their blessings and to present them with offerings. Thereafter, the King has money handed to all his old
royal attendants. On this occasion, a greeting book is provided at the Grand Palace for well-wishers to convey their felicitation for the King.

Another Buddhist ceremony is held on 6 December at the Amarin Winichai Throne Hall, where the King offers alms to monks and listens to their citing of sermons. Then, he graciously advises his royal family members to release various kinds of aquatic animals into the Chao Phraya River at the Ratchaworadit Royal Pier.

Besides royal ceremonies as mentioned, several activities in support of public charities are held to celebrate this important event, both through private initiative and by government agencies.

The Prime Minister, Royal Thai Government, hosts a festive reception in celebration of the His Majesty the King’s Birthday Anniversary, known as Samosorn Sannibat, freely translated as the ‘propitious congregation’, at Government House, on 7 December. This event, Samosorn Sannibat, is graced by the presence of members of the Royal Family and attended by invited guests, including eminent personages of the Kingdom and foreign dignitaries.

In the year 1960, H. M. the King’s birthday anniversary was decreed an important day for the Thai nation by Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, the then prime minister of Thailand. Up to now, it is a Thai national day, a most important event in the life of the Thai People.
Understanding the many facets of the role of Thai women broadens and deepens foreign readers’ knowledge about Thai culture. It is meaningful to focus, first and foremost, on the role of Her Majesty, Queen Sirikit of Thailand, the eminent role model of Thai women.

Queen Sirikit of Thailand

Since she became Queen, Her Majesty has assisted His Majesty the King in his development work. On the occasion of the King’s ordination as a monk, in 1966, the Queen served as Regent. The Queen has set the eminent role model for Thai people by promoting their well-being. Her Majesty has worked hard to provide them with a better life. Through her inexhaustible kindness, she has promoted the development of Thai people beyond imagination.
Ever since the coronation of His Majesty the King, in support of his work, the Queen has been looking after the Thai people, especially after those struggling to earn a livelihood and in need of occupational know-how. For more than 50 years, Her Majesty has upheld her vigorous resolve and strong commitment to occupational development geared to supplement family income, out of genuine concern and loving care that only a mother could possibly give.

In most grateful appreciation, the National Council on Social Welfare of Thailand moved, in 1976, that her birthday anniversary, August 12th, be celebrated as Mother’s Day, henceforth a national holiday.

Her Majesty has given rise to many development programmes that benefit men, women, youth and
children alike. She has initiated projects furthering both formal and non-formal education, promoting cash crop cultivation, preserving as well as revitalizing artisan techniques, and improving family welfare. All this has created employment opportunities, thus enabling families to generate supplementary income, in the long run.

In supporting the King in his numerous rural development projects geared to enhance social welfare and diversify agriculture, the Queen established “The Foundation for the Promotion of Supplementary Occupation and Related Techniques – SUPPORT”. Among its objectives are to preserve time-honoured crafts, techniques and skills. To facilitate the renaissance of ancient artistic treasures, she initiated the preservation, not to say the salvaging of traditional artistry under threat of disappearance. By retrieving indigenous knowledge from virtual oblivion and reviving techniques feared lost yet reconstituted through analyzing rare, preserved specimens of artisanship, she has enticed experts and laypersons alike to tap natural resources and mobilize human resources as well. As a result, thanks to her gracious initiative, dormant indigenous knowledge has been reactivated, new livelihood enabling strategies have evolved, creativity is kindled, and the range of superb artifacts keeps expanding.

The SUPPORT Foundation, for short, trains rural people in numerous occupational specializations. Such crafts are pottery including designing,
moulding, plastering, glazing and firing; sculpting of ceramic figurines and statuettes; decorating porcelain and ceramics; toy-making; making nielloware and jewellery; marquetry, incrustation and engraving; trimming, millinery and making hats as well as apparel finery; making of handbags and purses; making of pillowcases; fibre-extracting, processing, and twirling; basket plaiting and wicker-ware-making; mat-weaving; woodworking, cabinet-making, and wood-carving; spinning, dyeing, and weaving; crochet, embroidery, and lace-making; and dress-making.

Craftspeople thus trained find seasonal or full-time employment. As these beneficiaries have developed ever greater skills, SUPPORT Foundation products are becoming more and more sophisticated. Her Majesty has taken the lead in promoting the arts and crafts of Thailand by organizing exhibitions at home and around the world, thus gaining international fame for SUPPORT products and generating income for an increasing number of craftspeople and their dependents.

In the same spirit, Queen Sirikit has encouraged the formation of social welfare organizations, of which she accepted patronage, to offer assistance such as shelter for the homeless and orphaned, supplementary meals for children while at school, and funding medical treatment of badly afflicted individuals in dire need of help. The Queen has endeavoured in every way to elevate the status of women through programmes to educate and train
women, so that they may better their prospects in life. In this spirit, the Queen has served as President of the Thai Red Cross Society. Her Majesty’s compassion has been extended not only to the Thai people but also to refugees from neighbouring countries.

Her Majesty the Queen’s exceptional, outstanding leadership in fostering the role of Thai women has received international recognition in forms of awards and honorary degrees from world-renowned institutions and organizations such as, to name some, the Ceres Medal by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (UN-FAO), in 1979; the Honorary Doctoral Degree in Humane Letters by the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, Boston, in 1980; the Borobodur Gold Medal by the United Nations Educational and Social Commission (UNESCO), in 1992; the AIT Gold Medal for Leadership in the Conservation of Natural Resources and Protection of the Environment by the Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok, in 1992; the acclaim as “Woman of the Year” by Stanford University, California, in 1993; and the Gold Medal with Mention in recognition of outstanding achievements in the Training Programme to Improve Farmers’ Income under the tutelage of The SUPPORT Foundation, awarded at the “Brussels EUREKA 2001 : 50th Anniversary of the World Exhibition of Innovation, Research and New Technology”, in 2001.
The Role of Thai Women in Broad Perspective

Rooted in an agrarian society, culture and economy, Thai women have played vital roles throughout the kingdom’s history. Particularly at times of war, women tended to agricultural production as well as related activities and secured food supplies.

In contemporary Thai society, women enjoy the same constitutional rights and share civic responsibilities as men. Civil society has had women actively involved in terms of suffrage, voluntary work for the benefit of society, culture and environment, and formal education, at all levels, since early in the 20th Century.

There is ample evidence that parents, in bringing up their children, have instilled in their daughters a pronounced need for achievement. The result is omnipresent.

Women work as teachers at all levels of the educational system, from kindergarten to university. Likewise, health services and medical care are provided by women, to large extents and at high intensity. Many Thai medical doctors practising in Thailand and abroad have gained a high reputation for their professional skills and human relations. In regional national, and international arenas, women have joined men in building Thailand’s reputation as a serious competitor in sports. For example, in the 28th Olympic Games, August 2004, hosted by Greece, of the four Thai women entries for weight-lifting, two won gold medals, and the other two a silver and a bronze respectively. Another woman, with only six years of training, won a bronze medal in Tae-kwon-do. Because of the superb performance of the woman athletes, Thailand came out 25th among over 200 participating countries.

Scientific research work and fine art as well as performing arts are domains where woman scholars and
artists have excelled. Thailand’s bureaucracy offers career paths to women leading up to the highest echelon, both in the domestic and foreign civil services. The armed forces have women soldiers in their ranks and files, rising to the rank of general. Likewise, women perform important roles in organizations that are in charge of public administration as well as maintaining law and order. In the 1990’s, women were able to become district officers and governors, positions which had previously been monopolized by men due to traditional thinking and belief that women would not be able to be “tough” in dealing with violence-prone criminals and gangsters. This tradition and belief have been dispelled through experience and fact.

The competitive undercurrent between genders becomes evident in Thailand’s economy. More than half the country’s workforce engaged in agriculture are women, given the fact that a large proportion of the adult, able-bodied men have sought and found work abroad to boost family income through their remittances. Marketing agricultural produce is largely in the hands of woman traders, both in wholesale and retail trade.

Commerce-at-large, including finance, banking, insurance, export and import, is a segment of the economy with professional women ensuring best practice, and in increasing numbers holding key positions.

The transition from an agriculture-based to an industrializing country could not possibly have succeeded without the work input, dedication and diligence of today’s large female labour force, both at the shop floor and in top managerial positions.

The likely singular achievement of Thailand’s professional women is the establishment and development of the country’s transportation, hospitality and tourism industry. Its resounding success has become the engine of Thailand’s economic recovery.

It stands to reason that women, given their constructive and productive roles, have entered politics as candidates in elections at the various levels of the democratic system, from subdistrict councils to national parliament, where those elected serve as people’s representatives. Over recent decades, women have held ministerial posts in the Royal Thai Government or served as members of the Kingdom’s Senate.
The Royal Ploughing Ceremony
The Royal Ploughing Ceremony

The Ploughing Ceremony marks the start of the season when paddy land is prepared for rice cultivation. It signals to farmers that the time has come to work their fields and encourages them to try harder. This ceremony has customarily been performed in almost all countries of Southeast Asia. In monarchies, by tradition the ruler presides over the ceremonial proceedings.

During the Ayutthaya Period in Thai history, this ancient ceremony had been incorporated into the Palace Laws and became known as Charot Phra Nangkhan Raek Na Khwan, or the First Ploughing Ceremony, which formerly was performed exclusively as a Brahmin ritual. In the reign of King Rama IV (1851-1868), the Buddhist ritual was added, known as Phuet Mongkhon Ceremony, to bless plant matter and rice seed used in the ploughing process. It had been held at the Phra Ubosot of Wat Phra Si Rattana Satsadaram, on the day before the First Ploughing Ceremony. In more recent times of Thailand’s history, the ceremony of Phuet Mongkhon Charot Phra Nangkhan Raek Na Khwan had been performed yearly, until it ceased in the year 1936. By royal command of H. M. King Bhumibol Adulyadej, this ancient Thai tradition was revived in the year 1960. It has been held annually, to this date.

In history, this ceremony was held on an auspicious day determined by a royal astrologer, sometime in the month of May, to mark the beginning of the rice-planting season in Thailand. At present, this ceremony is performed in two parts.

To start the ritual proceedings, the Royal Phuet Mongkhon Ceremony is performed in the Royal Chapel at Wat Phra Si Rattana Satsadaram. Rice seed, plant matter and agricultural implements to be used in the ploughing ceremony are blessed through religious rites presided over by the King.

In the morning of the following day, the Royal Ploughing Ceremony proper is carried out in traditional style at Sanam Luang, on the open ground in the heart of the city of Bangkok. Beforehand, the ceremonial site is prepared by having furrows dug into the ground for the ritual ploughing.
A high-ranking government official in charge of agriculture is appointed to perform the role of the Lord of the Harvest, with four unmarried women officials of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives as his assistants. These Celestial Maidens, as they are known, carry the seeds in baskets suspended from slender yokes resting on their shoulders while circumambulating across the symbolic field, behind a pair of oxen/bullocks drawing the plough, directed by the ploughman. Thereupon, the Lord of the Harvest selects one of three pieces of scarlet cloth of varying lengths. His choice predicts the amount of rainfall for the incoming agricultural year. Then, the seeds blessed earlier by the King are broadcast into the furrows, from where they are later gathered by farmers who regard them as auspicious and keep them to mix with seed to be used in cultivating their own fields.

The ploughing ceremony is completed by leading the draft animals to troughs containing fodder and liquids, including paddy, corn, legumes, sesame, grass and water as well as liquor. The animals' first choices of fodder and liquids serve as means to predict the harvest of the forthcoming season.

Upon conclusion of the ceremony at Sanam Luang, some of the rice seed broadcast onto the ceremonial site is taken to the experimental rice growing station on the palace ground of Chitralada Villa, the royal residence, to be planted for the production of seed that will be required for next year’s ceremony.

The Royal Ploughing Ceremony, deemed a vital event by Thai farmers for their agricultural fortune, signifies one of the prominent traditional features of Thailand’s cultural identity.
Kathin is a Pali word for the wooden frame used to measure length and width by which the robes of Buddhist monks are cut, approximately 2 - by 1- meters (originally five by three sok, or 2.5 by 1.5 metres), hence called kathin robe. In the olden times, monks would make kathin robes by themselves by sewing together pieces of discarded cloth and dying it. More recently, kathin robes are sold ready-made. It has become a tradition to present monks with kathin robes upon the ending of the Buddhist Lent, during which monks are staying inside their temple compound. During a period of four weeks, starting upon the first night of the waning moon of the 11th month and ending with the first night of the waning moon of the 12th month. According to Dhamma precepts, any disciplined monk with older robes than others would be chosen by the monk assembly to receive presents of kathin robes. Following tradition, Buddhist believers would place kathin robes before the monks citing the Pali words of offering. This rite is known as Thot Kathin.
There are two kinds of Thot Kathin, the Royal Thot Kathin and the Thot Kathin performed by the general public.

The Royal Thot Kathin refers to the ceremony during which the king himself or, by royal command, members of the Royal Family present monks in temples under royal patronage with robes and gifts.

Thot Kathin by the general public are events in temples other than those under royal patronage, at which people present the monks in residence with robes and gifts.

Earlier in the Rattanakosin Period, the Royal Thot Kathin Ceremony had been held during the period between the 6th and 9th nights of the waning moon in the 11th month, each year, especially at the 9th waning moon when the river banks would be flooded. That is the time suitable for the Royal Barge Procession.

Nowadays, the King would proceed to officiate at the Royal Thot Kathin Ceremonies at 16 prominent temples under royal patronage as well as at the resident temple of Somdet Phra Sangkharat, the Supreme Patriarch. To the other temples under royal patronage throughout the country, the King would graciously delegate the responsibility for Thot Kathin to government agencies and the private sector. This is known as Kathin Phra Ratchathan, the Royally Conferred Kathin. This ceremony is conducted as prescribed by rules and regulations and supervised by the Department of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Culture, Royal Thai Government.
As of yore, royal processions on land were composed of elephants, horses and troops marching, all of them organized into three divisions, the forward detachment, the centre section, and the rear guard. The centre section was the most important, bearing the monarch’s regalia such as the Great White Umbrella of State, the Whisk and the Fan, among others. Their bearers were followed by the royal police guards and the chamberlains carrying arms, drums, conches, xylophones and the royal palanquin such as the Phra Thinang Rachentarayan or Phra Thinang Phuttan Thong thrones. The household guards, bearing a Sword of Victory each, marched at the four corners of the royal palanquin. They are surrounded by high-ranking officials, royal guards and household guards. Completing the centre section were household guards bearing the Diamond Spear.

The royal procession on land was modified and rearranged by the late chief of the navy in the reign of Rama VII, H.R.H. Prince Nakhon Sawan Woraphinit, into four sections, as it has been adopted to this day.

In the present reign of Rama IX, two royal processions on land were held. The first event was on the occasion of the coronation in the year 1950. H. M. King Bhumibol Adulyadej, seated on the royal palanquin Phuttan Thong, proceeded from the Amarin Winitchai Throne Hall to “Wat Phra Kaeo”, the Temple of the Emerald Buddha. The second such event took place on 7 December 1963, in celebration of the 3rd cycle birthday anniversary of H. M. the King. The King proceeded to pay homage to Phra Buddha Chinarat at Wat Bowon Niwet Wihan. Since then, a royal procession on land has not been repeated.
In history, royal processions were, first and foremost, identical with the strategy of proceeding, in war time, to the battlefield in impressive military formation, so as to display might and discourage the enemy. At times of peace, royal processions had been organized by royal command, for the king to perform eminent royal ceremonies. These included the royal processions to pay homage to prominent Buddha images, or to present kathin robes, conducted on land or by water.

Royal processions in the tradition of military parades are still being staged. They are, however, of ceremonial nature, such as trooping the colours with units of all armed forces saluting the king, and soldiers taking their oath and pledging their loyalty. Such event is a display of various regalia of the monarchy, with invited guests in attendance.
The Royal Barge Suphannahong is known worldwide as a masterpiece of Thai cultural heritage, having taken centre place in the Royal Barge Procession since the Ayutthaya Period. The barge is made from a single teak trunk, with the surface patterned through wood carving, covered in lacquer painting technique, inlaid with glass mosaic and gilded all over. This splendid decoration is enhanced by the prow in the shape of a swan neck and head, known in Thai as hansa, which in itself is a magnificent sculpture that seems to take wings and fly up into the sky in dignified motion.

Built during the Ayutthaya Period, it was originally known as the Royal Barge Suphannahong, later renamed the Royal Barge Chai Suphannahong and eventually the Royal Barge
Si Suphannahong. During the Rattanakosin Period, King Buddha Yot Fa Chulalok the Great, Rama I of the reigning House of Chakri, after his accession to the throne in 1782, had a new Royal Barge built and named the Royal Barge Si Suphannahong. She was in constant use as the principal royal barge until she was laid up in 1911.

In the reign of Rama VI, Major General Phraya Rajasongkhram (Kon Hongsakul) was appointed architect in charge of building the new Royal Barge Suphannahong, to be similar to the old Royal Barge Si Suphannahong of the reign of Rama I. The new royal barge, named Suphannahong, is 156 tons in weight, 44.90 metres in length, 3.15 metres at the beam and 90 metres in depth, with a draught of 0.41 metre. Her full complement consists of 50 oarsmen, two steersmen and two officers fore and aft. It is said that the master craftsman threw away all his tools upon completion of the construction of the barge, vowing never to do such work again. The new Royal Barge Suphannahong was launched on 13 November 1911 and has been used ever since. The barge is well-maintained and kept in good operational condition by the Fine Arts Department and the Royal Thai Navy.

During the present reign, the barge Suphannahong is commissioned as the Royal Barge for His Majesty the King in the Royal Barge Procession on the occasion of presenting robes to Buddhist monks (Royal Kathin Ceremony) at Wat Arun Ratchawararam (also known as the Temple of Dawn) and for other eminent royal ceremonies such as the Royal Ceremony in Celebration of the Bangkok Bicentennial in the year 1982.

A spire-shaped edifice or a tier-roofed pavilion sheltering the throne of the King is carried mid-ship. The oarsmen’s gilded paddles in rowing motion represent the sedate movement
of a swan’s wings, seemingly flying up to the sky. This stylized movement can be changed, by royal permission, to other patterns.

The Royal Barge Suphannahong has become an outstanding symbol of the Thai cultural heritage. This supreme specimen of Thai traditional boat building is being deployed in principal royal ceremonies and, thus, preserves and sustains ancient Thai culture.

Her graceful and dignified features continue to display the most ingenious creation and decoration by the spectacular Thai traditional craftsmanship as well as the magnificent identity of the Thai nation.

In 1992, The World Ship Trust Maritime Heritage Award “Suphan-nahong Royal Barge” of The World Ship Trust, under the patronage of H.R.H. Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, was bestowed upon this barge “owing to her beauty and superb craftsmanship” as highlighted in the personal, congratulatory message of H.R.H. Prince Philip in having this award presented on 4 June 1992, to H. M. the King who graciously had the award passed on to the Fine Arts Department.

The Royal Barge Suphannahong is the most intriguing of the symbols of Thai national identity, recognized worldwide as the embodiment of Thai culture. She is safely dry-docked in the Royal Barge National Museum alongside the Bangkok Noi Canal.
Every Thai constitution since 1932 has provided that a person shall have complete freedom to profess any religion, denomination or doctrine and shall have freedom to practise any religious rites as long as such practice does not go against public order and morality. The Royal Thai government has accorded people not only religious freedom but also full support to their faith. The state deems the patronage of religions as one of its affairs. Moreover, under the constitution the King is obliged to be a Buddhist and the upholder of all religions professed by Thai citizens.

Thai people are known for their tolerance and non-judgmental outlook toward others with different beliefs and values. The great majority are Buddhists, while about four percent are Muslims, one percent Christians and the remainder Brahmans, Hindus, Sikhs and others. There are hundreds of Islamic mosques, Christian churches and Chinese shrines as well as some Hindu and Sikh temples around the country alongside Buddhist temples of monasteries (wat).

Buddhism

It is a common belief that Buddhism came to Thailand in the 3rd century B.C. when King Ashoka the Great of India sent two Buddhist missionaries (Sona Thera and Uttara Thera) to Nakhon Pathom, the very first Buddhist centre, the capital of the ancient Dvaravati Kingdom of Suwannaphum (approx. 139 B.C.–457 A.D.). The stupa standing majestic in Nakhon Pathom was probably the first stupa built in Thailand. It is also possible that Buddhism came with Indian traders and settlers who for seven hundred years frequented the shores of present day Myanmar (Burma), Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Cambodia. The early settlers brought both Hinduism and Buddhism. By
the 6th century A.D. the religion was well established in southern and central areas of what is now Thailand.

The form of Buddhism observed in Thailand is Theravada Buddhism. Buddhism has played a profound role in shaping the Thai character and worldview toward events. The Buddhist concept of impermanence in the world of change, for example, has done much to create a feeling of relaxed charm that is one of the most appealing characteristics of Thailand. Over the centuries the Thai have incorporated older beliefs in spirits (phi) and other deities. Some of these non-Buddhist beliefs are Brahman in origin and have become part and parcel of the Thai social fabric including such occasions as birth, wedding, starting a business, and taking public office.

Buddhism teaches that one’s life does not begin with birth and end with death. It is a link in a chain of lives, each conditioned by acts (karma) that were previously committed and that are being committed. The concept of karma, the law of cause and effect, suggests that selfishness and craving result in suffering. Thus, by eliminating desire one can find peace of mind. Desire can be overcome by following the Middle Way. The concept is called the Four Noble Truths. The key to living a life in proprieties is to have right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. The end result is enlightenment leading to nirvana.

Buddhist temples are constructed and funded through charitable contributions from the general public. In order to obtain a permit to build a monastery, the promoters are required to submit a detailed proposal to the Sangha Supreme Council (the central administrative body that governs the Buddhist Order). It is noteworthy that a Buddhist wat is never isolated from its social environment. Most wat
have schools of some sort attached to them. The wat are open to anyone who wishes to seek refuge in them. In the rural areas, the wat is the focal point of the village, acting as the major unifying element, particularly during festivals and merit-making ceremonies. Abbots and senior monks frequently enjoy more prestige and moral persuasion than does the village head. In times of personal crisis they are often the first whose advice is sought. Within the wat, the abbot has absolute administrative and spiritual authority. It has been a tradition for a young man to enter monkhood for a period ranging from one week to three months. Almost every young man, before starting his own family, is expected to undergo this experience. Ordination ceremonies are usually held at the beginning of the Buddhist rainy season retreat. The newly ordained monk listens to sermons based on the Buddha’s teachings, studies the religious scripts or Tipitaka (the Three Canons, also known as Traipidok), practices meditation and learns the virtues of an ascetic life free from material possessions.

To people outside, the wat and its monks offer an opportunity for merit-making, an act believed to ensure the almsgiver of greater rewards later in life or after death. Early in the morning in a rural as well as urban area one can see several Buddhist monks in saffron robes and with alms bowls walk with grave dignity and accept alms from people. Besides giving food, the most popular way of earning merit is to make some repairs to the wat or replace a dilapidated religious building with a new one.

While in the monastery, the newly ordained monk listens to sermons based on the Buddha’s teachings, studies the religious scripts or Tipitaka (the Three Canons, also known as Traipidok), practices meditation and learns the virtues of an ascetic life free from material possessions.
Islam

Muslims constitute Thailand’s second largest religious group concentrated mainly in the southernmost provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani, Yala, and Satun. Islam is said to have been introduced to the Malay Peninsula by Arab traders and adventurers during the 13th century. Ninety-nine percent of Thai Muslims are Sunni and one percent Shi’ite. Both groups enjoy inspirational and financial support from His Majesty the King, who has provided funds for translating the Koran into Thai. Each year the King or the Crown Prince preside over celebrations commemorating the Prophet Muhammad’s birthday. Moreover, His Majesty appoints a Muslim religious leader as Chularatchamontri (State Counselor for Islamic Affairs). The government also provides funds for building and renovating mosques.

In the southern provinces where the Muslim population is substantial, government-employed Muslims are allowed to leave for important Muslim festivals and to work half-day on Friday, the Muslim holy day. In those provinces family and inheritance cases are judged according to Koranic law with a Muslim religious judge (kadi) sitting on the bench. In addition, Muslim employees are granted a four-month leave with full pay to perform the pilgrimage Haj to Mecca.

Christianity

Christianity was introduced to Thailand by European missionaries in the 16th and 17th centuries. These early Catholic missionaries were later joined by Protestants of the Presbyterian, Baptist and Seventh-Day Adventist denominations. Despite their small number, they have made major contributions to the country in many fields. For instance, in the early Rattanakosin Period some Christian missionaries introduced Thailand’s first printing press, and King Mongkut (Rama IV) learned
English and Latin from them. Others helped to introduce Western surgery, performed the first smallpox vaccination, trained the first doctors in Western medicine, and compiled the first Thai-English dictionaries.

Hinduism and Sikhism

The approximately 20,000 Indians residing in Thailand are almost equally divided between Hindus and Sikhs. The Hindu community is most densely concentrated in Bangkok where they worship their gods at four main Hindu temples. There are also several Brahman shrines where Hindus as well as Buddhists go to worship. The Hindus operate their own school, with the curriculum based on the Thai education system. In addition to the Thai language, these schools teach Hindi, Sanskrit and English.

Conclusion

Thailand welcomes different religious faiths in the Kingdom. Although Buddhism is the main religion, the Thai have always subscribed to the ideal of religious freedom and harmony. The Royal Thai government annually allocates funds to finance religious education and to construct, maintain and restore monasteries, mosques and churches. At present, Thailand is the seat of the headquarters of the World Fellowship of Buddhists, an international Buddhist organization promoting coordination and cooperation in Buddhist education and work throughout the world.
Thai Architecture
Thai Architecture

Since historical time, Thai architecture has been grouped into three categories, consisting of Buddhist temples and their monasteries, known as Wat in Thai, palaces, and houses. Buildings of each category are of distinct character, representing traditions in arts and craftsmanship. Art historians have further distinguished eight periods in the evolution of Thai architecture, namely, Dvaravati, Srivijaya, Lop Buri, Chiang Saen, Sukhothai, U Thong, Ayutthaya and Rattanakosin.

In the recent past, in the Rattanakosin Period, during the Sixth Reign (1910-1925) and the Seventh Reign (1925-1935), houses which are known as Ruean Panya, houses without ornamental gable ends, and Ruean Manila, recognizable by decorative items such as wooden, carved eaves, porches and artistic iron lattice trim, became popular. Under the impact of the transformation from the absolute to the constitutional monarchy, the introduction of parliamentary democracy and the adoption of Western technologies, architecture has reflected the blending of styles at great variety. While this is visible in government offices, commercial buildings and residential housing, Buddhist temples and monasteries, old and new alike, have upheld and preserved the Thai architectural tradition.

Architecture of Religious Edifices

Thailand is a country where freedom of worship is guaranteed. People enjoy the liberty to practice their religious belief as they desire. Based on the understanding that all religions induce their followers to lead their life in an observant, righteous and salutary manner, the king and his government have extended patronage equally to all religious communities in the kingdom. This explains the great variety of religious buildings throughout the country, including those of
Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity as well as shrines of celestial deities, ancestors, guardian spirits and local, benevolent spirits. Believers and pious people adhering to any of the various religions or spiritual protectors have rallied at religious sites established for worshipping, saying prayers, performing of religious rites and ceremonies, teaching and rendering assistance to those in need, complete with quarters for their monks, priests, prayer leaders, or sage individuals. By religious affiliation, these edifices are visibly distinct by their particular features. Buddhist temples and monasteries are recognized by structures like the Phra Ubosot, (the ordination hall), the Vihan, Chedi, Prang, Sala Kanparian, (preaching hall), Ho Trai, (the Tripitaka Hall), the Bell or Drum Tower, and the Kuti, the resident monks abodes. Likewise, there are Hindu temples, among them notably Brahmin temples, Christian churches, and Muslim mosques. Other structures of religious significance are shrines such as those housing the town pillars, those for ancestor worshipping, and those for seeking help from a host of local deities and spirits.

**Temple and Monastery Precinct - Wat**

The monastery is the central point for all Buddhist religious activities, enshrined the various rites and ceremonies. Various buildings within the compound of a monastery each serves a specific purpose. Objects of worship are enshrined, and the abodes of monks are located therein. As Buddhism has long been the religion of the Thai nation, the country has many Buddhist monasteries and temples, dating from ancient times, of which many have fallen into disrepair. Their present number exceeds, by far, those of the edifices of other religions. Buddhist monasteries and temples have remained the focal point of Thai culture and society. They are the embodiment of traditional architecture, a treasure trove of the fine arts like painting and sculpture, with superb specimens adorning the...
temple structures, and a source of inspiration for the upholding of traditional temple design and construction technique.

Two categories of Buddhist temples are distinguished in Thailand. They are the temples under royal patronage and the temples in the care of local worshippers. The former has been created by the king or by persons whose dedication has been graciously received by the king under his patronage and duly registered as such. All temples built and maintained by worshippers among the general public are located at sites graciously granted by the king.

The buildings in a temple compound form two ensembles, the temple premise and the monks’ quarters. The former includes buildings and structures known as Bot, Wihan, Chedi, Sala Kanparian and Bell and Drum Tower. The monks’ quarters comprise the abodes known as Kuti, the refectory and the pantry, among others. The structures of the two ensembles differ in architecture and refinement. They also reflect the period of their origin, the endowment by their founders and donors, and the contributions by their supporters.

Impressions of eminent temples in distant history can be formed by visiting the remains of certain ancient monuments at various sites such as at the World Heritage Sites of Sukhothai and Si Satchanalai and at Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya as well as the Chiang Saen Historical Park, to name some examples.

Shrines and Spirit Shelters

To mark an auspicious site, symbolic objects are placed there for people to pay homage, worship, seek blessing, or secure help, or else good fortune from them. People who believe in spirits and their supernatural power have provided an abode or shelter for spirits, in which to place idols. There are numerous categories of shrines and shelters for powerful spirits. Examples are shrines for celestial deities, ancestors, guardian spirits, and spirits perceived as inhabiting the animated environment.

Shrines and spirit shelters of particular significance are introduced hereunder.
City Pillar Shrine : San Chao Pho Lak Mueang

An eminent deity has been recognized as the guardian of the city protecting its population and ensuring its welfare. Thailand has several such pillar shrines, in Bangkok and in cities as well as towns throughout the country.

Any such shrine houses a pillar made from wood of an auspicious kind, venerated as the founding pillar of the settlement. Its top has been anointed by the king, using some fragrant and moistened paste.

Guardian Spirit Shrines

Small buildings built in Chinese or Thai style have been built as abodes for spirits of various kinds, including those of some deceased persons, of mythical or legendary figures, or of supernatural powers, where idols are kept, prayers said, oracles consulted, rites conducted and ceremonies performed. Examples of this category of shrines are San Chao Pho Suea, San Chao Mae Thap Thim, San Chao Mae Soi Dok Mak, San Chao Pho Khun Tan and San Chao Pho Ho Klong.

Brahmin Shrines

Shrines of deities widely held in adoration include some immensely popular shrines of the Hindu God Brahma and also of the Gods Vishnu and Ganesh. The statue of the Goddess Thorani, the Earth Goddess, has been a landmark in the historical core area of Bangkok.

Ancestral Shrines

Venerated idols or statues of heroes are enshrined in buildings of different architecture in many instances designed to suit the surroundings of historical significance. The object of veneration is an ancestor whose protection is sought. Ancestral shrines of this kind are those dedicated to King Naresuan the Great, King Taksin the Great, Prince Chumphon Khet Udomsak, and Phan Thai Norasingh.
Religious Edifices of Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam

Hindu deities are enshrined in several temples where Brahmin ceremonies take place. An eminent Hindu Brahmin temple is located on Thanon Dinso, Bangkok, built at the same time as the Girant Swing, by royal command of King Rama I, in 1784. The three buildings in Thai style are laid out in line, with the large one enshrining the idol of the God Shiva, the one in the middle housing the idol of the God Ganesh, and the third one as the sanctuary of the idols of Vishnu, also known as Narai, and of the Goddesses Lakshmi and Maha Savali.

Another well-known temple dedicated to the goddess Uma is Si Maha Umathewi, situated at the corner of Silom and Pan Roads in Bang Rak District of Bangkok. In the centre of this temple of the Sakti sect built in the southern Indian style 1879 the image of the goddess is enshrined. It is surrounded by idols of Shiva, Vishnu, Krishna, Ganesh, Khantha Kuman, Lakshmi and Kali. In the centre of the courtyard, a small Devalai with Siva Lingam and miniature models of sacred buildings lie.

Christian Churches

Throughout recent history, Thai sovereigns have granted land for the construction of Christian churches and donated other resources to their communities. Nowadays, Christians attend religious services in many churches all over the country, most of them built in Western architectural style. The following are two examples.

Santa Cruz Church is situated on the west bank of the Chao Phraya River. It was first built, at the time when Thon Buri was the capital of Siam, on the initiative of Padre Corre, and named Maha Kangkhen, Church of the Holy Cross. Early in the Rattanakosin Period, it was resurrected by Bishop Jean-Baptiste Pallegoix who renamed it Santa Cruz Church. Portuguese residents of Ayutthaya, who fled the
former capital after it had been sacked by the Burmese for the second time late in the 18th Century, built the Calvary Church on the east bank, in Samphanthawong District, Bangkok. At its site, a new church in Gothic architectural style was built in 1891. Its interior features a ceiling showing the star-studded sky and stained-glass windows depicting scenes from the Old and New Testaments.

**Mosques**

The architectural design of mosques, where Muslims gather to pray, listen to sermons and strengthen the communal bond, features a main building of one or several storeys, flanked by two minarets called *Ho Arsan*. The ground plan is mostly laid out as a square. A structural feature popular among Muslims in Thailand is a dome that tops the main building, with matching minarets.

Mosques as the centres of Muslim communities all over the country have enjoyed support of the Royal Thai Government. Mosques are concentrated in the four southern provinces of Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat and Satun. The central mosque of Yala province, named *Rao Dor Tula Yannah*, is the largest in Thailand. Deemed the most magnificent of Thailand is the central mosque in Pattani Province, altogether the first with two buildings for ablutions before saying prayers, one for men and the other for women. On the site of an earlier mosque, *Masjid Bam Bang*, the central mosque in Satun Province, was built in 1849 by *Phraya Samannatarat Burin*, the then governor of Satun.

There are several more old mosques like the one in Ayutthaya Province, named *Chao Phra Khun Ta Kia*, and the one of the *Kudi Khao* community in Thon Buri, known as *Masjid Bang Luang*.

**Palace Architecture**

According to ancient Thai belief, the king was born as an incarnation of a deity, who had descended onto earth to take care of people’s welfare. The architecture therefore reflects the monarch’s exalted status through grand design,
excellent execution, and dignified appearance. This is embodied, among other features, in tiered roofs and top structures in the shape of a Prasat. The interior of most such buildings was fully gilded and decorated with inlaid pieces of coloured glass. Royal palaces included various edifices, among them the Throne Halls, residential buildings for the king and members of the royal family, and quarters for employees of the royal household.

Housing Architecture

Architectural styles of residential houses, commercial structures and office buildings have been shaped by people’s wisdom in response to requirements of a particular locality. Over time, construction materials have ranged from bamboo, nipa palm leaves, thatch grass and wood to brick with mortar and concrete. Preferences have varied by climate, cultural traditions, social values and norms, and economic activities as well as lifestyle along the rural-urban continuum.

The Central Thai House

Owing to the hot climate, the largely flat terrain and the likelihood of inundation through rainfall and flooding by rivers, farmers representing the majority of the population have settled high above the ground near watercourses, the essential sources of their livelihood and means of transportation. Three types of Central Thai houses are distinguished, as described hereunder.

Ruean Khrueang Phuk, the “structure tied together” has been a common type in the Central Plain and found throughout the country as well. Non-durable materials easily found on location like bamboo, nipa palm leaves and thatch grass were used together with wood. The wooden frame was closed with plaited bamboo wall panels and the roof covered with thatch grass. All materials were tied together using rattan or bamboo strips.

Ruean Khrueang Sap is the type of house whose hard wooden structure is joined using bolts and wedges as well as some metal building material.
Houses of this type have been built as either single structures or ensembles of two or more structures, in one and the same compound. The latter are usually connected through verandahs. It is this type of house that has become known and appreciated as Ruean Thai.

A unique variant is the Ruean Phae, the floating house, built on a raft that is anchored at the river shore.

The Northern Thai House

Three types are distinguished, namely, {1} Ruean Khrueang Phuk or Ruean Mai Bua {2} Ruean Khrueang Sap or Ruean Ka Lae, and {3} Ruean Song Sala Nai.

The Ruean Khrueang Phuk or Ruean Mai Bua is the original northern Thai house constructed with a frame of hard wood, with walls made from plaited bamboo panels, and the roof thatched with banana leaves or vetiver. All components are tied fast using rattan or bamboo strips. These houses are usually built on high posts, subdivided into separate rooms and a spacious verandah.

The Ruean Khrueang Sab or Ruean Ka Lae is a hard wood twin structure on high posts that is roofed with tiles and has gables decorated with fine, ornamental carvings in “V” shape.

The Ruean Song Sala Nai is a variant of the Ruean Ka Lae, with adaptations of elements of houses in the Central Plain or showing influences of eastern style. Typically, gables and eaves are decorated with wood-carvings. Houses of this style have become ever more popular since the reign of King Rama V.

The Northeastern Thai House

Basically similar to either the Ruean Khrueang Phuk or the Ruean Khrueang Sap of the Central Plain and the Northern Thai house types as well, the following house forms are distinguished across the North-east of Thailand.
*Tup* is a temporary, small shelter, built on the ground or with a somewhat elevated floor, with a gabled roof and walls made from plaited bamboo panels.

*Ruean Yao* is built on high posts with a gabled roof. The structure is tied fast. It has two rooms, one a room for sleeping and the other a multipurpose space. There is no kitchen.

A semi-permanent variant of the *Ruean Yao*, which has three rooms, or two rooms and a verandah, yet no kitchen, is known as *Koei*.

*Ruean Koei* is the name of a wooden structure on high posts with a gabled roof and walls made from plaited bamboo panels. It has a roofed verandah extending the main house to an open platform or terrace, on which a fireplace or kitchen and a shed with jars to store drinking water are located.

*Ruean Khong* is a variant of the *Ruean Koei*, where the *Ruean Koei* is the large structure facing a smaller structure called *Ruean Khong* that is built apart yet connected by an open platform.

*Ruean Faet* features the main house with another structure at the same, raised floor-level or at a somewhat lower one, where the latter is being built incrementally.
The Grand Palace
The Grand Palace

The Grand Palace, which is popularly known as Wang Luang in Thai, was the principal residence of the king and the royal family as well as the premise of the royal household, in the past. Among the several important buildings in the palace ground are the Phra Maha Prasat, Phra Maha Monthian and offices like the Bureau of the Royal Household and the Office of the Privy Purse.

According to ancient Thai belief, the king was venerated as Deva, a deity born to help relieve people’s troubles and alleviate poverty. Thus, the king was revered by all his subjects as the “Lord of the Land”, sent to rule the kingdom. It was deemed mandatory to provide for the king most excellent residences, facilities and guards as required, so as to prepare the ground for the monarch to perform his royal duties. It is for this reason that the Royal Palace is a grand and sprawling residence fit for a king and his royal family, with such magnificent edifices as the Phra Maha Prasat and the Phra Maha Monthian, surrounded with walls and fortifications to keep a safe distance from the ordinary way of life.

In 1782, when King Phra Buddha Yodfa Chulalok the Great founded Bangkok as the capital of Siam, the name by which Thailand was known by then, at the site which has become
known as Rattanakosin Island, the plan of the new royal palace was laid out to resemble that of the Ayutthaya Period. Situated on the east bank of the Chao Phraya River, the precinct of the palace was divided into three parts, the Outer Court, the Central Court, and the Inner Court.

The Outer Court is situated at the front of the Grand Palace facing north. There the bureaus are located which directly serve the King.

The Central Court has been and still is the most important sector of the Grand Palace. There, the ensemble of the Phra Maha Prasat and Phra Maha Monthian buildings is located, which forms the centre that used to be the royal residence. It is here where the kings have officiated at eminent royal ceremonies, conducted state affairs, received foreign missions and ambassadors, and granted audiences to officials of the kingdom.

The Inner Court is situated adjacent to the Central Court, behind the grand ensemble of the Phra Maha Prasat and Phra Maha Monthian. This built-up complex that used to be the mansions of the royal consorts and the quarters of all female attendants was a zone forbidden to outsiders and to men, in particular. They were not allowed to pass the gate between the Central and Inner Courts, to enter the latter.

Circulation inside the precinct of the Grand Palace was channeled
through gates at which guards were posted. Areas requiring heightened security were protected by double gates. At the gates of the Central Court leading to the Inner Court, into which only women were admitted, women guards were posted.

All residents and staff domiciled in the royal palace were obliged to adhere to traditional rules of conduct and customary regulations.

The name of the royal residence, known as Wang Luang since the reign of its founder, King Phra Buddha Yodfa Chulalok the Great, was changed by Rama V, King Chulalongkorn, to “Grand Palace”, by which it has been called ever since.

Like in the past, at present the Grand Palace, which can be likened to the “Heart of Bangkok”, is a most magnificent blend of Thai and foreign styles. It features splendid artistic details and superb proportions, reflecting the wisdom and skills of its Thai builders in the tradition of the Ayutthaya Period. All sovereigns of the ruling Royal House of Chakri have supported the preservation and restoration of the Grand Palace, although it has no longer served as the royal residence since the transition from the status of an absolute to that of a constitutional monarchy, in the year 1932. Until this day, it has continued, indeed, to serve as the venue for principal royal ceremonies.

**Phra Thinang Chakri Maha Prasat** (Chakri Throne Hall)

By royal command, the Phra Thinang Chakri Maha Prasat was built in the reign of Rama V, based on the design commissioned from John Clunis, a British architect. It is an edifice with three flights built in European style and covered with tiered roofs and spires in traditional Thai style, resulting in a magnificent architectural blend of Western and Thai styles.
The most important part of the Phra Thinang Chakri Maha Prasat is the Central Throne Hall, where the Phra Thinang Phuttanthom, the Coronation Throne of the kings of the Royal House of Chakri is placed on a multi-tiered marble dais, surmounted with a nine-tiered, white canopy and flanked by two seven-tiered, white canopies. In front of one seven-tiered canopy, an image of the Rachasi, the royal lion, and in front of the other, one of the Khochasi, the mythical animal representing a lion with an elephant trunk, are placed. Behind the throne, the emblem of the Royal House of Chakri is portrayed on the wall. Thevada statues, images of angelic deities, on either side of the Phra Thinang Phuttanthom, serve as supporting devices for the king’s sword and for the royal signet casket.

The Central Throne Hall is the venue where the King grants audiences to foreign envoys on the occasion of presenting their credentials and to well-wishers on royal birthday anniversaries. It is in this splendid setting where the King hosts state banquets for monarchs and heads of state paying official visits to the kingdom.

Wat Phra Si Rattana Satsadaram
(Wat Phra Kaeo - Temple of the Emerald Buddha)

Upon relocation of the capital of Siam from Thon Buri on the west bank to the east bank of the Chao Phraya River, by royal command of King Phra Buddha Yodfa Chulalok the Great, the plan laid out for the Grand Palace included the royal chapel. Like the palace, the temple was designed to resemble Wat Phra Si Sanphet in Ayutthaya, in its structure and position inside the walled palace precinct to the east of the Outer Court. Housing the Emerald Buddha, the temple was named Wat Phra Si Rattana Satsadaram.

On the days dedicated to the worshipping of Lord Buddha, popularly known as wan phra, one day during each week identified according to
the traditional lunar calendar, and on Sundays according to the Western calendar, access for worshippers and visitors is through the gate named Sawaddi Sopha, to worship, pray and pay their respect. On other days, believers and visitors are welcome to enter through the gate named Wiset Chaisi.

**The Cloisters**

The covered cloisters of Wat Phra Si Rattana Satsadaram, open to the inner precinct, surround the entire temple complex. The cloister walls are covered with mural paintings that feature the Ramakian epic in its version recorded by King Phra Buddha Yodfa Chulalok the Great, Rama I. The Ramakian, a modified variant of the Indian Ramayana epic, tells and depicts the great power of Rama, an incarnation of the deity Narai, whose task was to help mankind, according to the widely upheld tradition in several cultures of South and Southeast Asia. In relating the epic, the mural paintings depict Thai people’s way of life, their culture, traditions, fine arts and architecture. To view them in proper sequence, it is advised to proceed anti-clockwise.

**Phra Ubosot**

This most important edifice was built in the year 1783, in the reign of Rama I. It is a large structure resting on a curved base, in the traditional Thai style known as thong samphao, characteristic of the late Ayutthaya Period. Its wooden, carved and gilded pediments support Phra Narai mounted on a Garuda, the latter holding in firm grip the tail of a serpent-demon, known as Naga.

The interior of the Phra Ubosot is extremely refined, decorated in patterns of traditional Thai style. The mural paintings in its four walls relate the life of Lord Buddha. In the centre of the hall, the image known as the Emerald Buddha is placed on an elevated busabok or throne in the shape of a prasat with tiered roof.

At present, the Phra Ubosot of Wat Phra Si Rattana Satsadaram is
the principal site at which the King performs eminent religious rites and officiates at royal ceremonies. These include such events as the royal merit-making with religious rites on Visakha Bucha Day and royal ordination rites, and ceremonies such as drinking the holy water to pledge allegiance to the King and the inscribing on golden plates of the names of personages elevated to a higher rank.

**Phra Buddha Mahamani Rattana Patimakon** (The Emerald Buddha)

The statue of the Emerald Buddha shows the Lord Buddha in meditation posture. At the time of its consecration, in the year 1784, two splendid robes, richly decorated with gold and precious stones, had been provided, for the statue to be draped, one used in the hot and the other in the rainy season. During the reign of Rama III, a third robe was added for the winter season.

On the auspicious occasion of the Bangkok Bicentennial celebration in 1982, by royal command of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej three new robes were created. The robes would be changed by the King or, at times, by a member of the royal family granted royal permission to officiate.

The changing of the distinctly different robes is scheduled as follows:

- **Summer season**
  On the first day of the waning moon of the fourth lunar month, around March or April: an ornamental attire decked out with jewels set in an artistically wrought gold mesh

- **Rainy season**
  On the first day of the waning moon of the eighth lunar month, around July or August: covered in the style of a robed monk

- **Winter season**
  On the first day of the waning moon of the twelfth lunar month,
around November or December: clothed entirely in a precisely embellished cover, except for the head.

**Select Eminent and Fascinating Monuments in the Temple Compound**

- **Replica of Angkor Wat**

Upon royal command by Rama IV, King Mongkut, a miniature replica of Angkor Wat was constructed. It serves the purpose to raise awareness among the population of the close historical links between the Thai and the Khmer.

- **Phra Wihan Yot**

This rectangular building with four porches and a spire in the form of a Thai crown, decorated with ceramic plates, porcelain sherds and tile fragments, is one of the most beautiful specimens of the style that is characteristic of the Rattanakosin Period. The door and window frames are decorated in like manner. The royal initials Jor Por Ror of Rama V are portrayed on the door and window lintels. The door panels on the north side, inlaid with mother-of-pearl, were brought from the Wihan of Wat Pa Mok in Ang Thong Province of Central Thailand. They are masterpieces of Thai craftsmanship in the Ayutthaya Period, created during the reign of King Borommakot.

- **Thavaraban – The Giant Guardians**

Alongside the walls with the two gates for the public to the ground of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, there are six pairs of giants covered with porcelain fragments. Four pairs guard the ground along the gate named Wiset Chaisi, and two pairs the gate called Sawaddi Sopha. These large-size, tall statues represent the characters of giants from the Ramakian epic, the Thai version of the Indian Ramayana epic.

- **Phra Rishi – The Hermit**

The rishi or hermits were especially knowledgeable in traditional medicine and skilled in administering cures for illnesses. This bronze statue shows a rishi, his face radiating a benevolent air, seated and holding a mortar with pestle in front of him. This image was cast during the reign of Rama III.

- **Two Oxen**

Two bronze oxen cast during the reign of Rama IV are in front of the Ubosot. In historical time, they were installed in front of the royal pavilion at the annual Royal Ploughing Ceremony.
Thai literature has had a long history. Even before the establishment of the Sukhothai Kingdom there existed oral and written works. Generally, Thai literature is divided into four different periods:

1. Sukhothai Period (circa 1238-1377)
2. Ayutthaya Period (1350-1767)
3. Thon Buri Period (1767-1782)
4. Rattanakosin Period (1782-present)

1. Sukhothai Literature (1238-1377)

The literary works in this period were designed to reaffirm national cultural identity, political stability and spiritual values, with the monarchs taking the lead in the promotion of arts, religion and public administration. Thus, the stone inscription of King Ramkhamhaeng and those of others relate stories about the way of life of the people at that time in an agricultural society governed by some kind of kinship system.

Most literary works were written in simple prose with certain alliteration schemes. Major works include King Ramkhamhaeng’s Stone Inscription, Stone Inscription at Wat Sichum, Stone Inscriptions at Wat Pa Mamuang, Phra Ruang’s Proverbs and Traiphummikatha.

King Ramkhamhaeng’s Stone Inscription is considered the first Thai literary work in Thai script. It gives an account of the life of King Ramkhamhaeng the Great, the way of life of Thai people in general, laws, religion, economic and political stability.

The Stone Inscription at Wat Sichum is a narrative prose ascribed to the Venerable Phra Maha Sisattha Ratchachulamani, who preached Ceylonese Buddhism in Sukhothai. Written between 1347 and 1374 during the reign of King Lithai, it gives an account of the origin of the ruling Phra Ruang Dynasty, the construction of the twin cities of Sukhothai and Sisatchanalai, the construction of the stupa containing the Buddha’s relics, and the planting of sacred bo trees in homage to the relics. Such planting is believed to have started the practice of planting bo trees in all monastery compounds.

The Stone Inscriptions at Wat Pa Mamuang (tablets 4, 5, 6 and 7)
are probably the earliest translated literary works. The four tablets were inscribed with the same message in three different languages: Thai, Khmer and Pali. They were written around 1362. They describe the creation of religious objects and monuments and the construction of a forest monastery for King Lithai, a retreat for his religious practice and study of the Tripitaka.

**Phra Ruang’s Proverbs** is a collection of traditional Thai sayings believed to have originated during the Phra Ruang dynasty. They reflect the ideal way of life of the ancient Thai society.

**Traiphummikatha** or commonly known as **Trai Phum Phra Ruang**, was written in 1345 by King Lithai, the fifth king of Sukhothai. It expounds Buddhist philosophy based on a profound and extensive study with reference to over 30 sacred texts. The work could be considered the nation’s first piece of research dissertation. It was written in beautiful prose rich in allusions and imagery. It is a treatise on Buddhist cosmology, ethics, biology and belief system.

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**2. Ayutthaya Literature (1350-1767)**

The literature of this period started with the establishment of Ayutthaya in 1350 by King U Thong, the first king of Ayutthaya Kingdom and ended in 1767 in the reign of King Suriyat Amarin. A long span of 417 years witnessed an impressive array of literary works in both substances and forms.

The period produced a variety of forms on diverse subjects. New poetic forms were created, with different rhyme schemes and metres. It is common to find a combination of different poetic forms in one poetic work, resulting in **lilit** (a combination of **rai** and **khlong**), **kap ho khlong**, **kap he ruea** (a combination of **kap** and **khlong**), **klon konlabot** and **phleng yao**. Besides, the title name of poetry could describe the nature of its contents. For example, a poem with a title name of **kamsuan** is a lament over the parting from a loved one. Thus, **Khlong Kamsuan Si Prat** is a tragic story of a courtier named Si Prat serving under King Narai the Great, who was banished, mistreated and executed. Similarly, a poem with a title name of **nirat** is a description in verse of a journey
with a lament over the separation between two lovers. Some examples of nirat are Khlong Nirat Hariphunchai, Kap He Ruea and Kap Ho Khlong on the Visit to Than Thongdaeng by Prince Thammat-thibet.

The Golden Age of Thai Literature of Ayutthaya was manifest in three reigns:

1. During the reign of King Borommatrailokkanat (1448-1488) there were three major works. Lilit Yuan Phai is a narrative poem describing the war between King Borommatrailokkanat of Ayutthaya and Prince Tilokkarat of Chiang Mai. Lilit Phra Lo, voted the best of lilit by King Rama VI’s Royal Literary Club in 1916, had its origin in a folktale in the north of Thailand. It tells a story of love and passion that ends with the deaths of the young lovers, Prince Lo or Phra Lo the ruler of the city of Suang, and Phra (Princess) Phuan and Phra Phaeng, daughters of the ruler of the city of Song. The two principalities were bitter enemies. The romantic but ill-fated union of the three young royalties culminated in the bloody assaults by the palace security guards in which the lovers all died fighting. It is a story of love, bravery and sacrifice, showing the power of love and tragic ending.

Mahachat Kham Luang, written in the style of Buddhist chant, was a collection of works by a group of scholars commissioned by King Borommatrailokkanat. It tells the story of Prince Wetsandon and the virtue of giving.

2. The next prolific age of literature is in the reign of King Narai the Great (1656-1688) which saw a rise in such didactic literature as Khlong Phali Son Nong, Khlong Thotsarat Son Phra Ram and Khlong Ratchasawat. Khlong Phali Son Nong is concerned with the principles of entering into royal service while Khlong Thotsarat Son Phra Ram is mainly about how to govern and Khlong Ratchasawat about how to act as a good courtier. They were the works of King Narai the Great.

Chinda Mani was the first textbook of lessons on the Thai language and literature compiled and composed by Phra Horathibodi. Another important literary work is Phraratcha Phongsawadan Krung Si Ayutthaya, commonly referred to as Phongsawadan - Luang Prasoet Aksonnit’s Version, chronicling
royal and public ceremonies and festivities in each month of the year. Khlong Nirat Hariphunchai, the first Thai khlong nirat, describes a poet’s love and longing for his lady while on a scenic journey to Lamphun to pay respect to the Buddhist relics in the ancient kingdom of Haripunchai.

3. The third golden age of Ayutthaya literature is in the reign of King Borommakot (1732-1755). One of the most beautiful literary works is Kap He Ruea composed by Prince Thammathibet comparing the scenic beauty to that of his beloved lady on a boat journey in the nirat tradition. Traditionally, the verse is sung during the colourful royal barge procession. It has been the model for subsequent poets to emulate. The same prince also composed the greatly admired Kap Ho Khlong on the Visit to Than Thongdaeng and Kap Ho Khlong Nirat Phrabat. Another major work is Punnowat Kham Chan by a monk named Phra Maha Nak of Wat Tha Sai. The poem describes a visit to Phra Phutthabat or the Buddha’s Footprint Shrine in Saraburi province.

In addition, there is performing or dramatic literature including I-Nao, Dalang, Ramakian (a Thai version of the Ramayana), Sang Thong and Khawi. Some pieces are designed for recitals or accompaniments to the mask dance, shadow play and other dances such as Manora.

3. Thon Buri Literature (1767-1782)

Despite its short period of 15 years, Thon Buri produced Ramakian, a verse drama to which King Thaksin the Great contributed his poetic talent. The revival of literature at this time is remarkable since the country had not quite recovered from the aftermath of war. Some poets who later became a major force in the early Rattanakosin Period had already begun writing at this time. Luang Sorachit, better known as Chao Phraya Phra Khlang (Hon), wrote Lilit Phetchamongkut, a poem based on an old Brahmin tale while his I-Nao Kham Chan was drawn from the Javanese source. The Thon Buri Period saw the emergence of a new genre, an account in verse of foreign travel. For instance, Nirat Phraya Mahanuphap, sometimes called Nirat Kwangtung, was written by Phraya Mahanuphap recording the activities of a Thai delegation on a diplomatic mission to China in 1781.
4. Rattanakosin Literature (1782-present)

After sporadic fighting at the beginning of the period, the country gradually returned to normal. It is only natural that many of the early Rattanakosin works should deal with war and military strategy. Some examples are Rattanakosin poems like *Nirat Rop Phama Thi Tha Din Daeng*, *Phleng Yao Rop Phama Thi Nakhon Si Thammarat*, *Sam Kok* (a translation of the Chinese chronicles that recount the war between the three kingdoms) and *Rachathirat* (a translation of a war story from the Mon chronicles). When peace finally came, order was restored. Laws of the country were revised and historical events were once again systematically recorded. As a result, there came into being a historic legal document, *Kotmai Tra Sam Duang* or the Laws of the Three Seals and the Phongsawadan-Phan Chanthanumat's Version.

During this period there sprang a great wealth of Buddhist literature. Jataka tales include *Nibat Chadok* and *Hitopathet*. Didactic literature was also plentiful, e.g. *Kritsana Son Nong Khamchan*, *Suphasit Son Ying*, *Lokkanit Kham Khlong*, *Itsarayan Phasit*, King Rama VI's Thamma-Thamma Songkhram and other royal speeches.

There were a great number of emotive literary works in the early Rattanakosin period, some modelled on Ayutthaya and Thon Buri traditions, others being new creations. Some examples of the former category are nirat poems, phleng yao poems (lyrics) and tales. Nirat London was something of an innovation like Nirat Kwangtung in the Thonburi period. It was written by Mom Rachothai, the first Thai-English interpreter. One of the most emotive works with a style of its own, exciting subject matter and international outlook is Phra Aphai Mani, a long narrative poem by Sunthon Phu. Parody also made its first appearance in Raden Landai, a play by Phra Maha Montri (Sap), mocking the classical I-Nao with a congenial sense of humour and wit.

In the performing arts, perhaps the most important dramatic achievement is the complete work of Ramakian by King Rama I. In addition, there were dance dramas, for example, Unarut, Dalang, and I-Nao. There were also verse recitals with musical accompaniment, such as mahori telling the story of Kaki,
sepha relating the story of Khun Chang-Khun Phaen. Other recitals include Si Thanonchai and Nitthra Chakhrit. The latter work is based on The Tales of One Thousand and One Nights.

Literature has been closely associated with Thai life. In the earlier times, it was often recited at ceremonies and on other traditional occasions. For instance, when a ceremony to calm royal elephants was held, the assigned officials would recite Kham Chan Dutsadi Sangwoei Klom Chang or Kap Khap Mai Klom Chang. On the eve of the ordination ceremony, Rai Tham Khwan Nak would be chanted. At the annual celebration of Maha Chat, one would hear the chanting of Rai Yao Maha Chat.

With the printing of books and issuance of journals and magazines, new forms of writing appeared, especially in prose. The first daily newspaper in Thailand was called the Bangkok Daily Advertiser, which came out in 1868.

Another development was the writing of prose essays designed to spread knowledge and information as well as to express opinions and criticisms. Short stories and novels also made their first appearances. The first Thai essayist was King Rama V who wrote Phra Ratchapithi Sipsong Duean in 1888. Another essayist of great merit was Prince Damrongrachanuphap or Prince Damrong (1862-1943) who was an expert in history and archaeology. The first Thai short story writer was Prince Phichitprichakon who wrote Sanukninuk in 1885. The forerunner of novel writing was Phraya Surinthracha or Nokyung Wisetkun under the pseudonym of Mae Wan. He translated Vandetta by Marie Corelli into Thai, the Thai title being Khwam Phayabat.

What is striking about the literature of the Rattanakosin Period is that all the kings have played an important part in promoting and creating literary works. Their contributions and dedications to the literary cause have led to the proliferation of high-quality literary outputs whether they were original works or translations.

The Rattanakosin period was experiencing an internal social transformation and external influence from the West. In the wake of the setting up of the printing press in 1844, most works were written in the
Western style, as can be seen in magazine and newspaper articles, short stories, novels and literary translations.

After the establishment of constitutional monarchy in 1932, the Thai literary scene has been geared toward popular literature. The novel has enjoyed immense popularity. Novels come in many types and tastes. Some are historical while others represent political ideals. Adventure stories are mostly inspired by Chinese or Japanese works. Mystery and spy stories as well as light fictions are also popular.

Modern Thai poetry inherits much from the earlier Rattanakosin experimentation. For example, King Rama VI introduced several forms of verse characterized by new rhyme schemes including Khlong Sinthumali, Maha Sinthumali, Chitlada and Maha Chitlada. Another innovator of poetic forms was Prince Phitthayalongkon (under the pseudonym of N.M.S.) who invented Sayam Ratthana Chan. Such creative force is also seen among modern poets such as Khru Thep and Mr. Angkan Kanlayanaphong.

In terms of the relationship between poetry and the lives of the Thai people, nothing comes anywhere near songs. There is a vast array of musical compositions and songs - classical, modern, Thai-Western, and country. There are also songs that reflect Thai life in rural areas.

Generally speaking, Thai modern drama is modelled in the most part on its Western counterpart. Other types of dramatic art that should be mentioned here are radio and television plays. Radio plays emerged in 1937, characterized by wordplay and humorous incidents. The first Thai television play was a comedy with incidents taken from Khun Chang-Khun Phaen. Directed under Khru Neo Duriyaphan, the play was first televised in 1955 on Thai TV Channel 4, the first television station in Thailand. At present, many modern television plays are adaptations of popular novels.

With a long history of more than 700 years, Thai literature has become quite complex and varied. Thanks to the literary tradition, it still goes strongly with the tide. Contemporary fictions, short stories, poetry, plays and movies are now concerned with social, economic and psychological issues. They grapple with new social and cultural values. Whatever direction Thai literature will take, one thing is certain. It will always keep the Thai character.
Legends and Folktales customarily consist of tales and stories handed down from generations to generations. Not only do they reflect a particular cultural heritage in the form of entertainment but also an embodiment of local ideas, beliefs and surroundings. Cultural groups in Thailand have been traditionally divided into four geographic regions: north, central, northeast and south. Although they may have experienced different historical, social and cultural developments, all these four regions share a common belief in Buddhism and comparable tradition of agricultural society.

The Legend of Cham Thewi

Once upon a time, Suthewa, a hermit of Burapha Nakhon, inadvertently found a baby girl borne by a lotus flower. He took care of the baby until she grew up to be a maiden. The hermit was worried that the people would think that she was his wife. He then placed her on a bamboo raft floating along the Raming River. Fortunately the King of Lavo discovered her. He took care of her and brought her up as foster-daughter. Upon maturity, she was wedded to the King’s son, Prince Kamphotcha.

In the meantime, Burapha Nakhon was stricken by calamity because the King had failed to fulfill the ten virtues of any incumbent king. In fact, the guardian deity was angry, inspiring flood and inundation that resulted in the death of large numbers of people and animals. In response to this, Suthewa, the hermit, invited another hermit, Sukthanta, to found a new city named Hariphunchai (now known as Lamphun Province) and requested the King of Lavo to appoint Princess Cham Thewi to the new throne of Hariphunchai.

Cham Thewi was very pleased and agreed to take the crown, especially since she could meet Suthewa again. Prince Kamphotcha refused to come with her, saying that Suthewa wanted to meet her alone. On her way to Hariphunchai the procession passed along the Raming River and many places were named in honour of Cham Thewi, who had passed the
waterway before. Those names have survived to this day, for instance, “Ban Tak” is believed to be the place where Princess, Cham Thewi dried her clothes after taking a bath and “Sam Ngao District” is the place where the Princess while pregnant, stayed by the river and when the sun shone on the Princess, it cast shadows of three persons.

**Thao Saen Pom**

A king who has established the kingdom of Chiang Saen, was invaded by a great king of Mons from the City of Satong. Since the King of Chiang Saen was unable to resist the invasion, he took flight to the south and established a new city called Trai Trueng. The fourth king of this new kingdom had a beautiful daughter who was fond of eating eggplant. A poor man by the name of Saen Pom kept a garden to grow eggplants. (“Saen Pom” means 100,000 skin growths all over the body). On one of the plots near his hut, big eggplants grew and Saen Pom always urinated on the plants. When he knew that the daughter of the King extremely liked eggplants, he picked the biggest one and presented it to her. The King’s daughter soon got pregnant and eventually gave birth to a fatherless boy. The King immediately summoned all the male subjects in the kingdom and asked each one of them to bring one kind of food. He used this occasion to prove that if the baby boy took any food given by one of them, that man was surely the boy’s father. The boy took the balled rice from Saen Pom and ate it. The King got so mad and embarrassed to find out that his daughter had chosen an ugly looking commoner. He expelled her and the boy including Saen Pom from the palace. Saen Pom took them to the forest. Since Saen Pom was divinely blessed, the God Indra transformed himself as a monkey and handed him a magic drum. He was told that if in his prayer, he made three wishes and then beat the drum, he would be granted all that he wished for. Saen Pom requested for all the skin tumours to disappear so that he would be handsome, for him to rule a kingdom and for his son to have a golden cradle. All his three wishes were granted. He ascended the throne as King Sirichai Chiang Saen. A golden cradle was given to his son who later, after the death of his father, ascended the throne as King U Thong [Golden
Cradle]. King U Thong later moved down to the south and established a new kingdom which later became known as Ayutthaya. He was then crowned under the name of Somdet Phra Rama Thibodi I. In history, Ayutthaya was known as one of the prosperous kingdoms in Southeast Asia. This can be seen in a number of great and artistic monuments and art objects. In fact, in 1991 A.D. the ancient historic city was declared one of the World Cultural Heritages.

**Thao Pachit – Nang oraphim**

The origins of the city of Phimai [now located in Nakhon Ratchasima Province] are well depicted in the legend of the ruler of the Khom Kingdom. It was related that King Uthumrat of Nakhon Thom [Angkor Thom] sent his soldiers to find beautiful women for his son, Thao Pachit, to choose from as his bride. The prince, however, did not show interest in any of them. The king then called an astrologer to foretell the prince’s bride. The astrologer predicted that the future bride of the prince was in the womb of a woman farmer, who had a halo over her head. Prince Pachit travelled to find the woman until he reached Ban Samrit, located in what is now Phimai district. There he met a pregnant woman who was about to give birth. This was precisely as foretold by the astrologer. The Prince approached the woman and helped her in farming. Soon, she gave birth to a girl, named Oraphim. When the girl grew up she truly fell in love with Thao Pachit. One day, he asked for a leave to the city of Nakhon Thom and promised to return with a procession to take her home as his bride. At the same time, King Phrommathat, the ruler of the city of Phimai, who had heard of the beauty of Oraphim, sent his soldiers to capture her and kept her in his palace. Oraphim requested the king to wait for her brother to meet her before she could become his queen.

When Thao Pachit and his entourage reached the city of Phimai, on knowing what had happened to Oraphim, he disguised himself and headed for King Phrommathat’s palace, informing the guard that he was the brother of Oraphim. The guard led him to Oraphim and when she saw Thao Pachit, she exclaimed “Oh!Phimai” [means “Oh! My brother comes”]. The expression later developed into “Phimai” and has remained so until today. Mean-
while, King Phrommathat was deeply pleased to see Thao Pachit since Orraphim promised that she was to become his Queen after having met her brother, Pachit. The king threw a big party to celebrate the occasion where Orraphim unceasingly served him liquor until the king was drunk and unconscious. Thao Pachit took the chance and beheaded the king. He fled with Orraphim to Nakhon Thom. On their way, they successfully overcame diverse obstacles confronting them until they reached the city. On their arrival, King Uthumrat bestowed the throne to Thao Pachit. According to some accounts, Thao Pachit and Orraphim returned to the city of Phimai, occupying the throne under the name of “King Phrommathat”. Furthermore, the new king offered a solemn cremation ceremony for the late King Phrommathat and dedicated to his memory a high rising crematorium in the heart of the city of Phimai, which is called “Phrommathat Crematorium”. It is located about 300 metres away from Prasat Phimai. Inside the Prang Phrommathat or Phrommathat Stupa, an ancient stone carving showed a woman with her palms together in worship of a man. It was believed that the woman was Orraphim and the man was King Phrommathat.

**Manora**

The folktale of Manora generally prevails in all regions of Thailand. However, in Southern Thailand, it has been performed as the traditional dance of the region, called “Nora”. The story of Manora unfolds as follows:

King Athittayawong of the City of Udon Panja had a son named Phra Suthon. One day, a brave, competent hunter named Phran Bun went to hunt at the faraway Himavanta forest. On his way, he came across seven kinnaris [half female-half bird creatures], who took off their wings and tails for a swim. The hunter used a noose to harness them and caught the youngest, Manora. He promptly brought her back to the city and presented her to Phra Suthon to become his wife.

One day, when the enemies attacked the capital city of Udon Panja the King authorized Phra Suthon to expel them. The night when Phra Suthon defeated the enemy, King Athittayawong dreamed that his intestines came out, binding the
He sent for an astrologer to interpret the dream. The astrologer who had wicked intentions toward Phra Suthon, deceptively predicted that it was a bad omen, for Phra Suthon had taken an evil woman from Himavanta as his wife. To ward off the bad omen, he had to offer Manora as a sacrifice. When Manora heard of the advice, she developed a tactic for an escape.

She requested to have enough ornaments that would make her more beautiful before her death. She put on wings and a tail and then performed fabulous dances that overwhelmingly excited the audience. Then she hastily flew back to her parents at Khao Krailat. However, since Manora had been associated with human beings for quite some time, she was ordered by her father to confine herself to a palace outside the city. Only when she succeeded in getting rid of the odour of human beings, she would be brought back to the city. Phra Suthon was surprised to know what had happened to Manora when he returned to the city after his victory over his enemies. He immediately went to Khao Krailat. At the time of his arrival in the city, Manora had just completed washing herself for the total of seven years, seven months and seven days. Thao Pathum, Manora’s father, heard of Phra Suthon’s arrival. The King thought that his guest had great powers and enormous tenacity so he asked Phra Suthon to demonstrate his powers until the King was happily satisfied. Then he ordered his seven daughters to sit together and asked Phra Suthon to identify Manora among the seven. If he could identify Manora, they would be allowed to get married. Since all the seven daughters were very much alike, Phra Suthon was extremely confused. By the power of Phra Suthon’s confusion transforming himself into a golden fly and landed on Manora’s hair. Phra Suthon then could point her out and they got married.
Traditional Performing Arts in Thailand
The traditional performing arts in Thailand provide an excellent insight into Thai cultural identity and its rich variety. There are both similarities and differences among the traditional performing arts in the various regions of Thailand, as will be seen below. But there is one salient feature that stands out, especially with respect to the performing arts in the central region of the country, the cradle of Thai civilization. And that is the seamless integration between cultural expression and agricultural work, especially rice-growing. The totality of artistic performances is very much connected with the group and community effort required in the production of rice and other crops, in a benevolent environment of abundance, both of water and other natural resources.

The above idea can be seen more clearly below, in a brief description of the more popular performing arts of Thailand.

**Central Region**

The traditional performing arts of central Thailand—an area where rice is predominantly grown—are of the “dialogue” type between groups of male and female performers. There might be no music accompaniment that is played on instruments except for the creation of rhythm, all of which is intended to relieve the boredom of work, to inspire unity and comradeship, and to provide entertainment on festive occasions. The creation is mainly one of different types of music (in Thai called “Phleng”), such as Phleng Choi or Phleng Kiao Khao. The verses and repartees of the “phleng” are either from memory or improvised, usually showing wit and competency in language usage. The leading male and female singers are called Pho Phleng and Mae Phleng, while others sing in chorus. The Phleng can be performed without a stage, reflecting the informal and egalitarian culture of village life, but some “phleng” have been developed into popular entertainment and require a stage.

Then, there are some traditional performing arts which require music accompaniment, for example, the Ram Klong Yao (“Dance of the Long Drum”). Some are stage plays with...
Brief descriptions of all these arts mentioned above are as follows:

**Phleng Kiao Khao (Rice Harvest Song)**
This Thai performing art is derived from songs sung in the work context. It is performed as a means of entertaining oneself after working hard in the fields. The dialogue is one of courtship and uses sharp, amusing wit with the accompaniment of Thon.

**Phleng Song Fang**
This is a ‘dialogue’ type of performing art, performed by rice farmers while dehusking paddy. The performers take turns in singing their verses. Others sing in chorus while awaiting their turns.

**Phleng Ram Khao San**
This performing art clearly illustrates the centrality of rice and Buddhism in the Thai traditional culture. The female-only performers, in groups of four to five persons, embark in boats. They row their boats along the streams and canals and sing verses to persuade households to make merit by donating uncooked rice. The items obtained are taken to temples for the sustenance of monks.

**Phleng Ten Kam**
This is a dialogue-type of performing art, with performers carrying a sheaf in one hand and a sickle in the other. They sing and perform an act with implements used in rice cultivation.
**Phleng Ruea (Boat Song)**

This is performed at the time of year when the river water level reaches the highest watermark. In the beginning, groups of men and women embark in separate boats equipped with *ching, chap, krap* and a *thon*. Singing is done by a member of each boat in terms of courting and repartee. Those whose turn has not come will sing the chorus. The dialogue is improvised and can deal with religious themes as well.

**Lam Tat**

This is a communal performance, performed at night, and can last till dawn, generating after-work joy and friendship among youth. It mainly uses language as a vehicle, and often incorporates folk tunes as accompaniment. Players are divided into two groups according to gender. One group sings a form of verse in which the last word of each second line of the stanza rhymes. The verses are witty, with double meanings. The other group beats a large *Rammana* (one-sided drum with shallow body) in accompaniment. In addition to Lam Tat tunes, players often incorporate other folk tunes in the course of the performance. Players wear traditional Thai shirts with brightly coloured flower-prints, to emphasize the light-hearted nature of the Lam Tat.

**Phleng Choi**

Phleng Choi is similar to the Lam Tat in terms of having two teams, segregated into women and men, but not needing any musical accompaniment. To provide rhythm, the players clap. The dialogue could be topics of worldly affairs, morality, and courtship, some of which are verses with double-meanings. Generally the performance starts with paying homage to teachers and ends with valediction.

**Li-ke (Music Drama)**

This is a very popular stage performing art. The performers are cast according to role in the story and dressed accordingly in colourful, traditional Thai stage attire. In some
stories, if appropriate, the actors can be dressed in modern clothes. A curtain in the middle of the stage provides the setting appropriate to the theme of the play. The music accompaniment is provided by an ensemble playing Thai musical instruments. The actors both sing and dance to the verses and tunes. The total effect is a rousing feast to the senses.

**Ram Klong-Yao (The Long-Drum Dance)**

This is performed on all festive occasions such as making merit at home, monk ordination ceremonies, weddings, etc. The players can be male or female. The dance is done for fun and relaxation, without any deeper meaning. It can be a dance with bare hands or with cymbals, and without a preconceived plan. Contortions of all kinds can be incorporated into the dance, depending on the performer’s creativity. The Long Drum is played throughout the dancing, to provide pulse and excitement, both while stationary or during a procession to celebrate something.

Thus, Thai performing arts of the Central Region relate intimately with communal life centred on agricultural work and water, in the context of a socio-economic setting of peace and natural resource abundance.

**The North**

The salient pattern of northern Thai performing arts is the Fon (Dance), a dancing art performed by pairs of dancers. On important occasions, there could be hundreds of dancers performing the Fon in spectacular symmetry. The dancers are selected from pretty girls, and are dressed in multi-coloured clothes typical of the region. The Fon is a slow and stately dance. Its magnificence comes from the beauty of the dresses and the perfect unison of the movements.

The Fon has been in existence for hundreds of years, especially at the
northern royal court, but now roupes have been formed to perform at temples which often act as benefactors and sponsors, thus keeping the tradition alive. The music accompaniment uses traditional northern Thai instruments, including gongs.

Many variations of Fon are performed. The Fon Thian (Candle Dance) is done at night in the open with the performers holding a candle in each hand. The dancers move along, and the candles are visible as a graceful display of light, in addition to illuminating the beauty of the costumes and faces of the dancers, providing a sum total of a uniquely northern Thai art form—that of “graceful beauty in a candle-lit setting”.

The Fon Lep (Dance of the Long Fingermails) is similar, in regard of manner and occasion, to the above Fon Thian, except that the dancers wear six-inch long brass nails, and the performance is often held during the daytime.

The Fon Man Mongkhon is a beautiful dance, a blend of northern and central Thai arts, with some adaptation from Burmese art (northern Thailand has a long history of cultural association with Burma) which results in a quickening of tempo. Each dancer puts on a long floor-length traditional Thai skirt, with a short long-sleeve blouse crossing down just below the waist, and a knee-length long scarf. The hair of the dancer is partly wrapped into a central knot and partly flowing down to the left shoulder. Fresh flowers are attached to the hairdo,
the total combination being one of well-rounded beauty and grace which is very pleasing to the eye. This dance is performed on all festive occasions.

The Fon Dap (Sword Dance) is another dance, with performers moving about graciously with swords in their hands, and sometimes in their mouths, to the accompaniment of rousing music.

**NORTHEAST**

**Mo Lam**

This is a traditional performing art well-known in northeast Thailand (called Isan in Thai). It is a type of folk singing with music accompaniment. The singer is called Mo Lam and the musician is called Mo Khaen. The Mo Lam sings in verses with the backdrop of folk tunes. The subject of the verses can be about Buddhist ideals, courtship, or Jatakas. Or, it can be a dialogue type of verses. These verses are either recited, or improvised, or else conceived impromptu.

There are several variants of the Mo Lam. One popular variant is called the Ordinary Mo Lam Mu (Group Mo Lam). In this case, one to thirty players are dressed according to the story-setting and their roles, and the performance is on stage with curtains to cover entries and exits. The stories are taken from the Jatakas or made up in order to teach certain religious ideals, or it could be merely to provide pure entertainment.

The Khaen is used to provide music accompaniment, and the performance is usually done at night.

Other Mo Lam performances have specific themes. Mo Lam Phi Fa aims to heal an ill person by inviting a benevolent spirit, the Phi Fa, to drive out the evil spirit causing the illness. The Mo Lam Phak Wan is a courting performance sung by young men as an invitation to young women to pick the Phak Wan (the leaves of a tree used to make soup) together. The verses aim at wooing the female and can also describe the forest scene in a romantic way.

**SOUTHERN THAILAND**

**Nora**

This is the most important of the Southern traditional performing arts. It has been the mainspring of Thai dramatic art for hundreds of years. The cast is male and female, and the main literature of the play has been the story of “Phra Suthon and
Nang Manohra.” The stress is more on dance movements and scripts rather than on the story. Nowadays, other stories are also used for performances.

**Nang Talung (Shadow Puppetry)**

Another famous southern traditional performing art is Nang Talung or shadow puppetry, reflecting the cultural influence of Java, which is strong in Southern Thailand.

In Nang Talung, the shadow puppets are made of cattle hide scraped into thin slices and cut into shapes and sizes according to the stories. The puppets may include heroes, heroines, ascetics, jokers and even objects such as trees and palaces, depending on the story. These puppets act out certain movements by the puppeteer’s manual manipulation. The light behind the puppets casts shadows on the white screen stretched in front of a small raised stage.

The puppeteer will do all the singing, commenting and speaking. Music accompaniment is provided. Modern Western instruments have been added recently.

Originally the performances were limited to the *Ramakian, Manohra* and the like, but at present any story may be performed by this traditional art. The verses are of various types, such as eight syllabic verses, four syllabic verses, three-five syllabic verses, etc. But the verses, music and puppeteering must synchronize.

Nang Talung may be performed during all festive occasions.
Traditional Thai music has characteristics of both art and science. It has unceasingly been developed and finally become a vital element of the Thai way of life.

According to archaeological evidence, several instruments such as the bronze Mahorathuék (ceremonial kettle drum), stone bell, and metal windbell that produced sounds had been used in every region of the country. These instruments were not originally created to entertain but rather to produce signals for communication and some were employed in performing important sacred rites. It has been claimed that these are musical instruments which have been passed down to the present generation since prehistoric times.

The development of Thai music resulted in two genres:

- Folk music is performed in diverse unique styles in various regions of the country; and

- Traditional music, which has a style that closely resembles the style from the earlier generation, continues to enjoy popularity until today. This has been formally endorsed as a branch of National Arts.

There are several categories of traditional Thai music which have been handed down from generation to generation.

Traditional Thai music is known for its many rules and it has several styles in the performance of musical ensembles which have been much improved during the Rattanakosin Period. Musical performance varies depending on the occasions, for
example, the accompaniment of rites, entertainment, performances, and competitions. Because of its rules, Thai music has a strong foundation and continues to flourish.

**Musical instruments**

Scholars in the field of music have concluded that Southeast Asian music is dominated by percussion instruments, and that Thai music is no exception. In any Thai musical ensemble, there are several classes of percussion instruments that may vary in size. They are made of wood, leather, or metal. The most prominent ones are the Khong (gong), Klong (drum) and Ranat (xylophone).

Stringed instruments are classified as follows:

- plucked instruments (lute) such as the *Phin Pia*, *Phin Namtao* and *Chakhe*;
- bowed string instruments such as the *Saw U*, *Saw Duang* and *Saw Sam Sai*, which was developed by H.R.H. Prince Nakhonsawan Wora-phinit, one of the artistic princes of the Royal House of Chakri, to produce more varieties of pleasing sound.

Most of the stringed instruments popular in Thailand are used for folk music and have no fixed and
Thai musical scale differs from that of the Western and neighbouring countries. Traditional music is categorized into two modes, namely: Pentatonic Mode (6 1 2 3 5) and Septatonic Mode (5 7 1 2 3 4 5). Scholars in music identify Thai traditional music as having its own style and identity, the Equidistant Septatonic Scale. His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, who has a great talent in music, called on all Thai music teachers to preserve the original mode of the Thai music and not to be influenced by the Western mode.

Musical Ensembles

Traditional Thai musical ensembles can be performed at the Palace or at the houses of wealthy band owners, or to accompany some sacred rites and performances. There are several classes of traditional Thai musical ensembles such as: the *Khrueang Sai Ensemble* (string ensemble), the *Pi Phat Ensemble* and the *Mahori Ensemble*. During the reigns of King Rama V and King Rama VI of the Rattanakosin Period, musical ensembles were developed by adopting some elements of Western
musical instruments to become the novel string-musical ensemble. At present, “Maha Duriyang”, a musical ensemble, for instance, consists of hundreds of musical instruments played by musicians from various educational institutions, all over the country. It annually presents a special performance before the royal seat of H.R.H. Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn.

In this globalizing world, Western music has been popular and predominant in Thai society, however, attempts have been made to preserve traditional Thai music as a National Art. Although international music is popular among the young generation, the pride of traditional Thai music in it several aspects is upheld. It has been taught and regularly performed in many famous institutions of higher education. It has been included and studied in other branches of knowledge such as anthropology and history. Besides this, high technology has been adopted to preserve and disseminate traditional Thai music like the physical science to measure and compare the musical scales and the computer to arrange teaching programs. Traditional Thai music has already been taught in some educational institutions in several countries such as Kent University, Ohio, U.S.A. It is clearly enjoying popularity and stimulating interest among international communities.
The ASEAN Dove Competition Festival (Yala Province)

Yala is the southernmost province of Thailand. It is an ancient city with a history of coexisting cultures where Thai, Muslim and Chinese communities live in harmony whilst maintaining their desired cultural identities.

One feature of the province that residents are very proud of is the fact that Yala is home to the popular annual “ASEAN Dove Cooing Contest and Festival”, held in the first weekend of March where Javanese doves (Columbidae) from Thailand and neighbouring countries compete for the most melodious and sweetest cooing sounds. Visitors and dove owners come mainly from Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, and Brunei. The doves are judged by their melody, loudness of its cooing, and pitch. Separate competitions are held for high-pitch, low-pitch, and medium-pitch dove categories. For a dove that is prized, its cooing must be resonant, rhythmic, and it must be able to sing for a relatively long time. With one of these qualities missing, the chances of winning lessens. Good cooing doves can command a high price in the market; those that have won competitions can fetch several million baht.

In the old days, the raising of
Javanese cooing doves was very popular among all strata of society. Two types were popular, one, the “good looking” dove which may not have great cooing abilities, and the other, the “cooing” dove which may not be beautiful but excels in, as the name implies, singing.

The festival is held in central Yala, in Khwan Mueang Park, which is filled with thick lush green trees and also has a large lake. In addition to the dove competition, local sports are performed such as bull-fighting and cock-fighting, as part of the festivities.

Rap Bua Yon Bua Festival
(Traditional Lotus Flower Festival) (Samut Prakan Province)

The lotus is a highly respected—or even sacred—plant for Buddhists who use its flower in rites worshipping the Lord Buddha.

In the old days, in the district of Bang Phli in Samut Prakan Province, the lotus plant grew in abundance, especially during the rainy season. At the end of the Buddhist Rain Retreat, (from July to October), people from neighbouring areas of Bang Phli would converge there to collect lotus flowers to perform customary religious ceremonies. Soon, Bang Phli residents began the tradition of picking lotus flowers to share with these visitors so they would not have to pick them themselves. This beautiful act, full of symbolism, is called “Rap Bua” or “Receiving the Lotus” throws much light on the traditional Thai village social values of generosity mixed with religion, done in a typically Thai light-hearted manner.

On the night of the thirteenth day of the waxing moon of the eleventh lunar month (October) or the night before the end of the Buddhist Rain Retreat, Bang Phli residents would start the Rap Bua Festival. They would pick lotus flowers for sharing with visitors from other villages who will arrive for the festivities the next morning, as well as preparing food for them. The night’s preparatory activities are done

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in a joyful ambiance, with singing and dancing. Then, in the early morning the visitors arrive, paddling their boats along Samrong Canal asking for lotus flowers from Bang Phlee residents on the banks, to bring back to their village temples for use in the Rain Retreat ceremonies. In the old days, the act of giving was done politely, passing flowers from hand to hand, but has evolved to become a more informal act of “tossing” as participants became more familiar with each other as time went by. Hence, the festival has now become known also as “Yon Bua Festival” (Tossing Lotus Flower Festival)

The tossing begins at dawn and ends around eight in the morning, and as the visitors depart, a boat race is held as well just for fun.

One essential part of the festival is a boat procession on that day carrying the image of the revered monk Luang Pho To, along Samrong Canal. People on the banks would decorate their houses with flags, pennants, and set up Buddhist prayer altars. As the boat passes, residents toss lotus flowers onto the boat and Luang Pho To’s image is invariably covered with floral tribute up to the neck, as a mark of the community’s reverence for him. An all-night fair with traditional entertainment is also organized on the grounds of Wat Bang Phli Yai Nai.
The Loi Krathong is a well known festival among Thais and foreigners, held on the full-moon night of the twelfth lunar month or in November. Lotus blossom shaped vessels of various sizes called Krathong can be found floating lazily downstream on the calm waters of rivers and streams all over the country, with the sounds of joy and reverie of people on the banks enjoying the cool November night air, using the evening to make merriment as well as engage in a ritual spiritually connecting themselves with the Buddha. The krathong are cut from banana tree trunks in the shape of thick round slices, rimmed with leaves. At its most basic, the krathong usually contains a candle, three joss sticks, some flowers and coins. They can be very elaborately done up to a high level of artistic beauty. They give off various degrees of illumination—some dazzling some subdued depending on the number of candles and the way they are arranged on the krathong — as they float downstream to the delight of onlookers on the river banks.

But none of these scenes are more captivating than those found in the Loi Krathong and Candle Festival in Sukhothai Province.

There is evidence that in the days when Sukhothai was the capital of the Thai Kingdom, Loi Krathong was a state ceremony, a way of paying homage to sacred beings. Then, the tradition was modified when Nang Nopphamat, a favourite consort of King Phra Ruang thought up the idea of making the krathong into the shape of a lotus flower as well as other shapes, and use it to float downstream. The King was much attracted to the idea and thus decreed it an annual event. Since then, the floating of krathong has become a distinctive way of paying homage to the Lord Buddha, and the practice was called “Loi Krathong Prathip” or “The Floating of Candlelit Krathong.” So every year all over the country, people
from all walks of life would design and decorate krathong with care as befits a semi-religious object.

For Sukhothai, the festival is even grander, as the residents add on a land-based “candlelight festival” to the event. The candle festival proper begins during the daytime, with processions of “Phum Dok Mai” (splendidly-arranged flower tufts on a ceremonial tray), beautifully and elaborately crafted krathongs, and lovely young maidens from various parts of the province dressed in traditional Thai costumes. The processions wind their way through the city to converge at the hillock in front of the Phra Ruang Palace, or what is called the “Noen Prasat”, a key city landmark, from which they proceed in one long column to King Ramkamhaeng’s Monument at the Sukhothai Historical Park, which has a large pond.

At night a dramatic light and sound presentation is organized, with re-enactments of salient events in Sukhothai’s history. This is in addition to the principle event, the loi krathong plus candlelight festivities. The glorious light from candles on land combined with the picturesque scene from the numerous illuminated krathong and their reflections in the pond in the Sukhothai Historical Park setting make for a delightful and breathtaking atmosphere. People would light the candles and joss-sticks, make a wish and launch their krathong on the large pond, the belief being that krathong carry away sins and bad fortunes, and that their wishes will be realized by this meritorious act. Fun and merriment is provided by a contest for the most beautiful Phum Dok Mai and Krathong. In addition, a beauty contest, the “Nopphamat Queen Contest” named after Nang Nopphamat, the legendary figure from the Sukhothai Period mentioned above, adds a fun-filled dimension. In sum, a most memorable and auspicious night for all, in an optimistic ambiance filled with hope for the future.
Phanom Rung Festival (Buri Ram Province)

This Hindu sanctuary, evidence of an old civilization, in Nangrong District was left unattended and in ruins for many centuries until 1944, when the Thai Department of Fine Arts declared it a national protected archaeological site and began careful and detailed renovation using modern techniques, in order to restore it as close to its original state as possible. The restoration effort in effect took eighteen years.

The day which attracts the highest number of visitors is when the sun’s rays pass through the fifteen portals of the sanctuary in the same instant, creating a visually stunning effect, testifying to the superb skills of the temple builders. This date falls on the 15th day of the waxing moon of the fifth lunar month or in April of every year. Buri Ram residents believe that on this morning the sun’s rays are at their purest and most intense, burning evil things to ashes.

To provide an opportunity for residents to pay homage to the sanctuary on this propitious date, Buri Ram community leaders would organize a “The Phanom Rung Festival”. Key events include a procession organized according to ancient Khom traditions featuring a parade to honour the God-King, a grand folk musical performance, a Buri Ram products fair, traditional dances to pay homage to the gods, and a light and sound performance again dedicated to the temple gods.
There are several purposes to kite-flying in Thailand: extraordinary-shaped kites flown for beauty and fun; noise-making kites to invoke wind or good luck; kites used in warfare in ancient time; and kite-flying as gambling.

Kite-flying in Thailand has been in existence since the Sukhothai Period, around the 18th century of the Buddhist Era. A well-known kite is Wao Ngao, or Wao Dui-Dui (Jew’s-harp kite), which makes a humming noise all the time it is flown. This type of kite is believed to invoke wind or good luck. The noise it makes is supposed to repel all evils. Wao Chula (star-shaped kite) made its appearance in the Ayutthaya Period around the 19th century B.E., especially in the reign of King Phetracha. Kites were flown not only for fun but also for use in warfare. When the ruler of Nakhon Ratchasima staged a revolt, he could not be put...
down, at first. So an earthen pot filled with gunpowder was tied to the string of a Wao Chula, together with a fuse. The kite was flown across the city wall and then the fuse was lit, causing the pot with gunpowder to explode, setting the city on fire. In later times, there was evidence showing that kings were partial to holding contests between the Wao Chula and Wao Pakpao (diamond-shaped kite with a long tail).

In the Rattanakosin Period, kite-flying was still a form of popular entertainment and sport. King Rama V also loved to watch the contests between Wao Chula and Wao Pakpao. The King had open-air kite-flying contests held at Thung Pramen, or Thong Sanam Luang, also called Phramen Ground. The contests created a great deal of fun and the winners would be given royal trophies. King Rama V presided over the annual kite-flying contests from 1906 to the end of his reign.

The present-day annual kite-flying contests were first organized at Phramen Ground in 1953, together with the flying of other beautiful kites.

Kite-flying in each region is quite similar, except for certain local characteristics.

In the North, even though kite-flying is not a popular sport, it is thoroughly enjoyed by the local children. As for the beautiful kites that are flown, they usually feature the shapes of various animals.

In the Northeast, kite flying often takes place at the end of the rainy season, from November to January, since this is the time when the northeastern monsoon blows through Thailand. The kites popularly flown are of two kinds: plain kites such as Wao I Lum and Wao Chula Isan, and noise-making
kites, which are very popular such as Wao Aek or Wao Song Hong.

Kite-flying in the South is prevalent, especially in Songkhla. There are different shapes of kites such as Wao Nok, Wao Peek-aen, Wao Nok Yung, Wao Pla Peek-aen, Wao Khwai, and Wao Kradat. In provinces south of Songkhla, Wao Wong Duean is the most popular. In this region, it is customary to attach a bow-shaped piece of wood called *aek* or *sanu* or *thanu* to the tip of the kite.

There are several types of kites in the Central Region: traditional kites such as Wao Chula, Wao Pakpao, Wao Dui-dui, Wao Hang, Wao I Phraet, and Wao I Lum, and the newer type of kites showing foreign influence with their animal shapes such as Wao Ngu (snake kite), Wao Pla (fish kite), Wao Nok Yung (peacock kite), and Wao Phi Suea (butterfly kite).

Among the Thai kites, the most outstanding ones are Wao Chula and Wao Pakpao. Although they are flown mostly in the Central Region, they can be called Thai national kites which utterly differ from the kites of other countries, both in shape and movement while aloft. They have beautiful shapes and are most exquisitely made, capable of being manipulated to move gracefully and agilely by using only one kite string.

Wao Chula and Wao Pakpao can be flown just like other kites. What makes them special is that they can be used in kite-flying contests. In the reign of King Rama V, contests between the two types of kites were held in the King’s presence while a military band and a Pi-phat orchestra played on. If Wao Pakpao was losing and Wao Chula was winning, the band would play a Phleng Ho (soaring in the air tune). If Wao Chula plunged to the ground, a Phleng Ode (a lamenting tune) would be played. While the two kites were engaged in fighting, Phleng Chert Ching (a lively tune accompanying the performance of cymbals) would add to the excitement. If Wao Chula was being dragged in on a pulley, Krao Ram (a rousing tune played at a large gathering of men or in march time)
would be played. The King would present a lei or a gold cup to honour the kite that won the contest.

In the contest between Wao Chula and Wao Pakpao, the former is considered having an edge over the latter by virtue of its shape and weapon, resulting in Wao Chula being compared to a man and Wao Pakpao to a woman. The rules of the game, then, specify that Wao Pakpao be given a 2 to 1 handicap over Wao Chula. During the match, Wao Chula would be upwind and there would be a dividing line between the two sides. The kite flyers are not allowed to cross this line into the other side’s territory. Wao Pakpao would be beaten when Wao Chula could hook and immobilize it; that is, Wao Pakpao cannot slacken its kite-string because the “champi” of Wao Chula has squeezed its tail until it breaks off, or the tail entwines around the kite, or the paper in Wao Pakpao is so torn that the kite tilts, its wing torn, its tail broken, leaving only the body, or its body torn leaving the tail attached to the kite-thread of Wao Chula, or the string is broken, or the kite itself slips through the two balancing strings of Wao Chula and rips its body, etc. However, in the event that Wao Chula cannot bring Wao Pakpao down, and the latter breaks away and is carried by the wind to fall into the Pakpao territory, the match is forfeited and Wao Chula cannot consider Wao Pakpao the loser.

As for Wao Chula, it would lose to Wao Pakpao when it becomes entangled with the latter and plunges to the ground, unable to soar up again. It does not matter whether it plunges down because it gets stuck in a tree, breaks off along with Wao Pakpao, or floats into the Pakpao territory, even though both kites are still aloft, or when the Wao Chula flyer himself causes it to swerve to the ground. When Wao Chula falls into the Pakpao territory, it is judged the loser. But if before falling the kites become disentangled in midair, then the game is over, with neither side winning or losing.
TAKRAW

The Rattan Ball Game

Takraw is played in various versions, in most parts of Southeast Asia, but perhaps nowhere else is this exciting game, in which players must neither touch the ball nor let it touch the ground, played with the enthusiasm and vigour shown by Thailand’s star performers. Games are played in the courtyards of wat or temples, at fairgrounds, and, particularly during the kite-flying season when there is little or no rain at Phramen Ground in Bangkok. The small and hollow rattan balls which are the essential, and sometimes only necessary equipment for a game, are sold in rattan shops and sporting goods shops throughout the country.

While there are certain basic rules to takraw, the game varies according to the type of takraw being played as well as the place where it is played. In village games, for example, there is often no referee, and no score is kept; the winning player is simply the one who puts on the best show. The intricacy and speed with which it is played are astonishing. Methods of sending the ball aloft are the sole kick (using the arch or sole of the foot), the instep kick, knee kick, shin kick, shoulder kick, or head kick, and the crosslegged jump kick. The last consists of crossing the left leg over the right and leaping up to kick the ball with the instep of the left foot. Another version is the crosslegged knee kick. In this one, the player crosses his left leg over...
his right above the right knee, and then leaps into the air, kicking the ball with his right knee.

But that’s not all. One can use elbows, shoulders, even the posterior. The more complicated and impressive one’s feats, the better one’s score.

One of the most difficult of all acts is seen in a game of Hoop Takraw. The player makes a hoop of his arms behind his back, and kicks the ball with his heels through the hoop in such a way that it also passes through a hoop suspended in the air.

Hoop Takraw seems to be the most popular version of takraw in Thailand. A team usually consists of seven players (there can be no less than six) who stand at the perimeter of a circle. During a 30-minute period, the players cooperate with one another to earn a high score. Hoops are suspended above the centre and the players must hit the ball through them. Successive teams try to surpass the previous score.

Net Takraw is somewhat like badminton in that it requires a net and a court. Lots are drawn beforehand to determine placement of the players and the first serve. Near the net, the ball is then tossed to a teammate in the middle of the court, who kicks it into the opposite camp. The game then proceeds at an incredible pace as the ball is returned instantaneously, sometimes to great heights. Some players wear rubber plimsolls, while others are barefoot.

Net Takraw is played in the Southeast Asian Peninsula or SEAP Games (now call SEA Games) and other international competitions. Thailand introduced it to the SEAP Games, while Myanmar introduced
Apart from Net and Hoop Takraw, other variations are popular in Thailand. One of these is Tossing Takraw which has far less rules to abide by. The point is simply to see how many times the ball can be hit aloft by the player. It is a means of training for a player. Some can hit the ball from positions which call for stooping or lying down. A good player should be able to keep the ball aloft for ten minutes, and if he is joined by others, the group should manage to keep it in play for close to an hour.

Naturally, this is a skill which only the most adept players can manage. They have trained arduously and are able to concentrate for a long period as well as to use their bodies dexterously.

Three more variations of the game are called up hereunder.

- In-scoring Takraw is played with no nets or hoops. The ball rotates from player to player, and each is scored according to the skill displayed. After 30 minutes or 10 starting throws, the highest score determines the winner.
- Big and Small Ring Takraw are played by 7 or 5 players who stand in a circle and are given points for style, consistency, and retrieval of difficult balls.
- Takraw Wong (Circle Takraw) is commonly seen everywhere around the country. Takraw Lot Huang (Hoop Takraw) competitions usually take place at Sanam Luang during the summer season (February to April); and Net Takraw matches can be watched at the National Stadium.
Muay Thai, or Thai boxing, the most favorite martial arts of the Thai has been in existence for almost as long as the Thai themselves. Muay Thai is best known in the global community, especially among martial arts and boxing enthusiasts, for its various types of blows, and its coordinated utilization of all hard parts of the body with effectiveness and agility. Blows common to Muay Thai are forward and backward elbow strikes, knee strikes, swing and reversing kicks, and foot jabbing.

Muay Thai is different from Western boxing in the diversity of offensive and defensive blows, thus making the art more taxing and challenging to the boxer. Moreover, cultural and psychological elements are added to Muay Thai, as the boxer has to perform a traditional “paying respect to the teachers” ritual or Wai Khru ceremony, complete with rousing Thai music accompaniment. Watching Thai boxing is, then, an entry into the psychological world of the Thai where values such as respect for elders, love of grace, bravery, creativity and adaptability are encapsulated in one short event. This whole mix of a unique form of martial arts and cultural elements is what makes for the fascination with Muay Thai and explains its popularity worldwide.

Muay Thai matches today are organized on a regular basis at the many boxing stadiums in Bangkok and provincial cities. A regular ring that one expects to see at an international boxing event is used as the venue. The Nak Muay Thai (Thai boxer) wears regular boxing gloves yet fights barefooted.

At the start of the match, a Wai Khru ceremony must be performed, whereby the boxers enter the ring wearing a ceremonial rattan headband. An ensemble plays background music for this ceremony, with rousing levels and accelerating tempi throughout the fight.

Typically, the musical instruments
used are a Javanese reed-pipe, a pair of low-toned and high-toned two-faced drums and a pair of finger cymbals. The music accompanying the actual fight is quicker in tempo, and the tempo can even be variable. In moments of excitement during the match, the music becomes more frenetic, and when fighters are not going on the offensive aggressively enough, it can be paced quicker to urge them on. Thus, the music is functional as well as providing appropriate atmosphere.

The two boxers perform the *Wai Khru* ritual simultaneously with concentration and solemnity. Variations in the *Wai Khru* styles are possible, and it is not uncommon for boxers to murmur incantations to invoke respected spirits of the ring for protection against serious injuries that could arise from the fight. The purpose is also to stir up excitement and anticipation on the part of the spectators who may appraise the contestants by their performance of the ritual.

On completion of the ritual, boxers return to their respective corners to have their ceremonial headbands removed and receive last-minute instructions from their trainers. Then, boxers go into action to the sound of rousing music and fight, at most, five three-minute rounds alternating with two-minute rest periods.

Fists, knees, feet, hands and elbows may be used, but any form of wrestling, judo or throwing is forbidden. Contestants wear gloves and boxing trunks and fight barefooted. Their kicks can deliver a knock-out
blow. The elbows are wielded like hammers, giving a rain of hard blows to the side of the body, or head. Knees are used to jab viciously in the stomach, solar plexus, and ribs of the opponent. Opponents may hit any part of the body except for the groin which is not considered a valid target.

Points are scored for every blow on an opponent. If a contestant violates a rule, points are deducted from his score. The match may end with a winner by a physical or technical knockout or the referee’s decision; or it may be declared a draw.

**Evolution**

Muay Thai originated as a fighting skill, using parts of the body and sometimes with additional weaponry such as swords, pikes, and clubs. Muay Thai was used on the battlefield itself, at a time when hand-to-hand combat was the norm, as well as for protection against marauders. At a later stage in the history of Muay Thai, it proved not just a fighting skill in warfare and for protection of the community, but also became a spectator sport. Muay Thai contests gradually became an integral part of local festivals and celebrations, especially those held on temple grounds.

Indeed, Muay Thai was traditionally closely connected—as is the case with other facets of the Thai way of life—with the Buddhist temple or Wat. The Wat as a spiritual, social, and educational centre in traditional Thai village life was also the keeper and moulder of the Muay Thai tradition. The Wat was also a repository of the arts, not only religious kind but also of the a whole spectrum of artistic endeavour, including martial arts. And it was partly from the monks, some of which had military training and experience, that boys and young men studied this art of close-quarter combat, with all its innovations and adaptations.

Muay Thai was fought in contests using only bare fists in a circular open space, about eight metres across, so that fighters could move about freely. The number of rounds was not fixed, and the length of each round was timed by placing in water an empty half coconut shell with a hole bored in its bottom. As soon as the coconut shell submerged, the round ended. The prizes given to the winning fighters were generally victuals, but occasionally small cash
prizes were awarded.

The next stage in the evolution of Muay Thai was when the fighters started to bind their fists and lower arms, as described above, for both attacking strength and for protecting their fingers and wrists from sprains and other injuries. This is called khat chueak. Skeins of unrefined hemp threads were used. The contestants immersed their bound fists in water or any sticky liquid, and allowed them to dry, which hardened their fists. Another variant, which would cause terrible pain and injury to the opponent, was the dipping of the bound fists and lower arms into a tree resin mixed with tiny fragments of glass or coarsely ground stone. The boxer then had to dry the dipped fists in the sun for a short time so that the abrasive materials would be firmly embedded, thus making the punch more painful. There is no evidence of this form of fighting being regular, even in a combat setting, as the hardened fists would impair general hand-fighting flexibility. Such practice is ruled out now.

The Social Status of Muay Thai

Gradually, Muay Thai changed from a popular sport to a means of personal advancement, as the nobility increasingly appreciated the art and invited selected fighters to stay in their residences to teach Muay Thai to the staff of royal households, soldiers, and the king’s personal guards. During the Ayutthaya Period, a platoon of Royal Guards variously known as Kong Thanai Lueak (Elite Retainers) and Krom Nak Muay (Boxers Regiment) was established, comprising officers who were skilled in the art of Muay Thai, having been selected after exhibiting their fighting skills in front of the monarch. The selected fighters, in turn, taught Muay Thai to the princes and nobles, and the art as practiced by the nobility became known as Muay Luang or Royal Muay. This royal patronage of Muay Thai continued throughout the
reigns of King Rama V and King Rama VI, whereby fighters who had proven themselves through a succession of bouts in the provinces were invited to the capital city and fight in events attended by the king himself or his representative.

During the reign of King Rama V, the status and social standing of Muay Thai was enhanced further, as the King took a personal interest in the art and attended matches. Skilled fighters were even accorded relatively high-rank titles, as in the case of one boxer who was given the title Phra Chai Chok Chok Chana (Lucky Fighter and Winner) by the King and then went on to become a famous Muay Thai teacher. Another successful fighter was given the title Muen Mue Maen Mat (Knight of the Sharp Punch) and promoted to the high rank of a military officer. Active patronage continued during the reign of King Rama VI (1910-1925), who would travel to many provinces to watch specially arranged Royal Muay matches. It was in 1920, during his reign, that Muay Thai contests finally got their permanent home, the Suan Kulap Arena.

**Muay Thai in the Global Setting**

In the late 1920s, Muay Thai gradually adapted to a more international orientation. The *khat chueak* or bound fists were gradually abandoned in favour of Western style boxing gloves because it was felt the latter were less injurious. In 1929 a jock-strap or groin protector (*krachap*) began to be worn, adopted by a Thai boxer after having seen it used in Singapore, to safeguard against hard kicks.

Since Thai boxing has gained higher international exposure in line with an increasingly globalised world, promoters arranged for Muay Thai fighters to go to the US and other countries, to stage exhibition matches and even to organize tournaments between Muay Thai fighters and
practitioners of other martial arts such as karate and Western boxing. In the late 1950s, a Japanese boxing promoter became fascinated with Muay Thai and studied it closely. He then devised a concept of Japanese kick-boxing, fusing Muay Thai kicking techniques with aspects of karate and Western boxing. Later, his troupe of Japanese kick-boxers fought with Muay Thai fighters. He also introduced this kind of competition in Europe, creating some confusion there as Japanese kick-boxing was seen as synonymous with Muay Thai, although in reality they are quite different in terms of conceptual and cultural breadth and depth.

It was in the 1970s that Muay Thai began to flourish internationally. At that time, the oriental martial arts, in general, had a large following, spurred by the popularity of movies starring the Kung-Fu king, Bruce Lee. Thai boxing rode on the crest of this wave and Muay Thai gyms were established in many countries, especially, the US, Germany, the Netherlands, and Australia. It has become well established as the premier martial arts globally, as evidenced by the proliferation of Muay Thai clubs with sites in the worldwide web. World championship matches comparable to those of Western boxing are being held regularly. Muay Thai has come to be acclaimed “the King of the Martial Arts”.

The Wai Khru Ram Muay Ceremony (“Ritual Dance of Homage to Teachers”)

The uniqueness and universal attractiveness of Muay Thai lies partly in the fact that not only is it a
highly efficient martial art form, but it is also infused with Thai cultural values woven in a seamless manner, thus making Muay Thai a reflection of some of the intrinsic qualities of Thai society. The Wai Khru or Paying Respect to the Teachers Ceremony is an ancient Thai tradition closely bound with the fundamental concept that all providers of knowledge are Khru or teachers, and are worthy of the highest respect. That respect is expressed in the spiritual, graceful, and highly symbolic Wai Khru Ram Muay, the “Ritual Dance of Homage to Teachers”, immediately prior to the fight.

There are many styles of rituals so that two boxers would not in theory, be performing an identical Wai Khru Ram Muay. The dance starts with the boxer getting into the right frame of mind that will augur well for his fight, by focusing positive thoughts on the following auspicious symbols: one’s religion, parents, teachers, and loved ones who had passed away. Then, he starts with doing three prostrations to mark respect for the three pillars of Thai society: Nation, Religion, and King.

Then, the boxer performs the second sequence in a kneeling posture, one knee to the ground and the other leg bent up front. He pivots around on the spot and repeats the same posture facing all four sides of the ring. But one must take care not to start the sequence by facing the west, which in Thai culture is an unlucky direction.

Last is the ritual dancing sequence where the boxer shuffles out to the centre of the ring in harmony with the live background music, performs the ritual, then returns to the boxer’s corner, and repeats the rite on the other three sides of the ring.

Music Accompaniment

In Muay Thai, rhythmic music accompanies both the Wai Khru Ram Muay as well as the actual contest. The music is played by the Wong Pi Klong (pi klong band) performed by four musicians. One plays the pi chawa (Javanese oboe), two play the Klong khaek (a pair of Thai drums played by two musicians) and another plays the ching (Thai cymbals). The tempo for the Wai Khru ritual is slow and stately to match the solemn mood of the ritual, with a smooth and flowing rhythm.
It is probably not an easy task for anyone to trace back the history of Thai food. However, the salient characteristics of Thai food are obvious, and they are hot, hotter, and hottest; to be more precise, spicy, spicier, and spiciest. Complementary to that, a myriad of tastes adds to the distinctiveness of Thai food. Thai cuisine is now one of the world’s most sought-after, and the famous dish, *Tom Yam Kung*, is definitely top on the list.

In terms of its unique place in the culinary world, Thai food has, for centuries, enjoyed the benefits of influences from the Chinese, Indian, Javanese (or Indonesian) and even Portuguese cuisines, among many others. There are many references to the introduction of their influences which have contributed to the amalgamation of the tastes, shapes and forms of Thai food. In several cases, Chinese dishes might have been incorporated into Thai dishes gradually, and have been accepted as part of the Sino-Thai cuisine.

The Royal Thai Government proclaimed, in 2004, that Thailand is going to be “The Kitchen to the World.” Now, Thai food has become even more widely known and appreciated by the world’s connoisseurs as well as the general public.

In the past, to savour the authentic and wonderful taste of Thai food, travellers had to make the long journey to Thailand. Today, Thai restaurants and Thai food can be found in almost every corner of the world, especially in metropolitan areas.
has a milder taste, in comparison to the food in other regions.

Northeastern or Isan Thai food reflects the long relationship with a neighbouring country, the Lao PDR. The most famous dish, which has garnered its reputation both domestically and internationally, is the spicy papaya salad or Som Tam.

Central Plain is a melting pot where different culinary spheres have mixed to create a perfect harmony. This, of course, is highlighted by the invention of the culinary arts of the royal courts throughout the long history of Thailand. These culinary arts focus on the beautification and presentation of the food as well as harmonization of its tastes. To be classified into the genre of real Thai food nomenclature, its root usually originates from the royal cooking households. The most striking feature is fruit and vegetable carving, which no other country in the world can match.

Southern food is typified by the Malay culinary culture. The major influx is from Malaysia, the country that shares a border with the South of Thailand.
Thai Herbs & Spices

Herbs and spices are almost synonymous with Thai food. The more the herbs, the more spicy the food. This use varies from region to region. Traditionally, parts of many plants are herbs and spices in Thai cookery. While it may be an almost impossible task to characterize one particular herb and spice as of a particular region, the ubiquity of these herbs and spices in Thai culinary arts is obvious.

The most common herbs and spices in Thai cooking are cardamom, chilli, cinnamon, clove, coriander, cummin, galanga, garlic, ginger, kaffir lime, krachai, lemongrass, mint, and shallot.

Another ingredient almost indispensable for Thai cooking is coconut. It is an essential addition to several dishes, including desserts and sweets.

Any Thai menu would be incomplete without an assortment of sauces. The three flavours most commonly found in Thai sauces are salty, sweet, and sour. Fish sauce or Nam Pla is the most common, and it is the ultimate ingredient in a multitude of Thai delights.

It is both an art and science to concoct a proper combination of all these herbs and spices. Furthermore, perfect mouth-watering tastes are attained with the “secret” knowledge of cooking that is passed down from generation to generation.
Thai Fruits

For hundreds of years, Thai fruits and the life of the Thai people have been interwoven. These fruits have a variety of taste, shapes and forms, and have evolved over a long period of time, and might have been named in correspondence with the place or in any regional language from where they were derived. For example, durian might have its roots in Tapah Village or Salang Village on the island of Sumatra, where the natives call this fruit “Turian” or “Tulian”; mangosteens (“mang khut” in Thai) is derived from “mangostin” in Tamil or “mangustan” in Malay.

Fruits en route

Chinese documented evidence on the Funan Kingdom, dated back to the first century A.D., shows that the southern part of what later became Thailand, starting from the eastern part of the Gulf of Thailand up to the mouth of the Chao Phraya River, has been involved in extensive maritime transportation and trading. A number of fruits have been exchanged around these ports-of-call. Some of these fruits have been transported to and planted in Chanthaburi as well as Trat and at the rim of the Chao Phraya River Basin. It can be concluded that in the Sivichaya Period a great variety of fruits were transported from the southern part of India via Java to southern Thailand, Malaysia and China.
Sukhothai Orchards

The Sukhothai Kingdom emerged in the 13th century A.D. People in that period grew rice, sugarcane, coconut, cotton, and mulberry, consuming or using them in diverse ways. There was a time when the Thais were almost self-sustained, with an abundance of fruits and vegetables, cattle, and beasts of burden.

There were several types of orchards, such as areca palm, betel vine, coconut, jackfruit, and mango. The first three were very important to the way of life of the Sukhothai people. On the one hand, areca nuts and betel leaves were used for medicinal and aesthetic purposes; they were also served to guests. Coconuts, on the other hand, were adopted in a myriad of religious and ceremonial functions.

As for other fruits such as hog plums, tamarind, Java plums, jackfruit and mangos, they were widely grown in the villages, flourishing as a result of the efforts of the community. People had gathered them from the forest, to eat, and indiscriminately scattered their seeds. Consequently, these fruits grew widely, and the village became the cornucopia of fruit species.
The fruits that we are familiar with these days, such as rambutan, mangosteen and durian, were not present then. They were not indigenous to the surrounding environment, and some were imported species, for example, custard apples and guavas. Thus, it can be safely stated that fruit orchards in the Sukhothai Period were derived from the seeds acquired from the forest, followed by fruit trees prospering in the villages.

**Ayutthaya Orchards**

During the Ayutthaya Period, fruits from the Western hemisphere, such as custard apples, papayas, pineapples, and guavas, were introduced. Wheat was also cultivated.

As the population density in Ayutthaya was much higher than that of Sukhothai, more food, fruits included, had to be produced. Some of these fruits, during this period, were of high quality and sold to nobility and foreigners. The state also levied taxes on agricultural produce.

The Thais grew fruit and vegetables around the capital city, and along the canal south of Ayutthaya down to Bangkok. These fruit farmers practised selective breeding, adhering to traditional Chinese techniques, and preserving surplus produce. Jam and pickle were made through successful food processing and preservation techniques. The most sought-after fruit of the period must have been durian since it was taxed at one and a half baht, while mangos and mangosteens were taxed at one baht, per tree.

Imported fruits became common during this time. The seeds of custard apples, guavas, papayas, and pine-
apples, among others, were brought into the country for planting. Thais were also introduced to some temperate climate fruits, for example, longan and lychees, as well as some tropical fruits, such as rambutan, durian, and mangosteens. The Ayutthaya Period was a blending phase of fruit species from the former Sukhothai Period, with some imported species from neighbouring countries as well as some faraway lands.

Rattanakosin Orchards

At the nexus between the late Ayutthaya and the early Rattanakosin periods lay a great many orchards along the Chao Phraya River, starting from Thon Buri upstream to the north. Several towns were named after the fruits, such as Mangosteen and Lychee sub-districts. Beyond the Thon Buri perimetre, the land was very fertile for rice paddies and fruit orchards. During the reigns of King Rama III and King Rama IV, several canals were dug and connected to the
Chao Phraya River, making the fertile land spread into Samut Songkhram Province. The kings had a significant role in supporting the breeding and growing of popular fruits. The support was by means of tariffs, incentives and exemptions. During King Rama V’s reign, Thailand again witnessed the import of foreign fruit seedlings for planting in Thai soil. Upcountry orchards also became well established, and they included those in the provinces of Petchaburi, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Chumphon, Chiang Mai, and Chanthaburi.

**Fruits of the Day**

Today, Thailand is one of the major fruit countries exporting not only to the regional markets but to the world. The country has a vast reservoir and diversity of fruit species, both temperate and tropical.

Thai fruit crops can be classified into two groups, i.e. seasonal and year-round. Seasonal fruits include mangos, durian, rambutan, longan, and lychees. Year-round fruits are pineapples, bananas, papayas, and jackfruit. These fruits come from different regions of the country, and represent “tasty ambassadors” of each of the regions.

*North:* Temperate fruits are the major products in the northern part of Thailand. These fruits include lychees, peaches, strawberries, cantaloupes, longan, and persimmons.

*South:* Tropical fruits are the favourite of the South. The primary fruit crops are durian, rambutan, coconuts, pineapples, jackfruit, oranges, longkong, and langsat.

*East:* Tropical fruits also reign supreme in the eastern part of the country. The star performers are durian, mangos, custard apples, watermelons, mangosteens, grapes, oranges, rose apples, bananas, and rambutan.

*West:* Tropical fruits characteristic to this region are sugarcane and bananas.
Thai handicrafts are the products of intricate creativity and long held heritage of the Thai people in various parts of the country. The handicrafts are made primarily for practical purposes and also as items of beauty. Following is a list of outstanding Thai handicrafts with their unique characteristics which make these items one of the most outstanding attractions of Thailand.

**Nielloware:** Originally, nielloware were all hand made but nowadays, some are made through the use of equipment and the application of modern technology. Nielloware is the art of applying an amalgam of black metals to etched portions of either silver or gold. Nielloware products include trays, bowls, teapots, cutlery, jewellery, and boxes for betel leaves and areca nuts.

**Bronze Ware:** There are two kinds of bronze ware in Thailand. The first type is the bronze (alloy of tin and copper) object which is cast by the lost wax process wherein molten bronze is poured into baked clay moulds, such as in the making of Buddha images and bells. The second type of bronze ware is made by striking heated pieces of metal into various shapes such as utensils and weapons, i.e. knives, axes, spades, sickles, and metallic bowls. The same process is used in making silver and gold ware. The following are examples of the unique sites for bronze ware: Bronze ware at Ban Pa-Ao, Ubon Ratchathani Province.

**Weaving:** Hand-woven fabrics and mats have developed into the present-day cotton and silk weaving traditional folk craft. Especially the hand-woven fabrics have become the major handicraft of the country in terms of the production for Thailand’s garment industry. The delightful designs of the fabrics vary according to the unique
Bencharong (five-coloured) ceramic ware

Gilded lady’s handbag

Silverware
characteristics of each region. *Tin Chok* from the North and Northeast, for example, *Nam Lai* of Nan; Laplae, Uttaradit Province; *Hat Siao*, Sukhothai Province; Phum Riang, Surat Thani Province; Ko Yo, Songkhla Province; *Prae Wa*, Kalasin Province; *Hang Krarok*, Surin Province; Ban Khwao, Chaiyaphum Province; Amphoe Chonnabot, Khon Kaen Province; Amphoe Pak Thong Chai, Nakhon Ratchasima Province and Chanthabun Mats, Chanthaburi Province.

*Lacquer Ware*: Lacquer is used to provide a nice finish, through the decoration of gold leaf to the artefact container or basket made from bamboo. The major design is called *lai rot nam* (in black and gold). In the northern part of Thailand, a group of people known as Thai Khoen specialize in the production of lacquerware, hence the name Khruang Khoen or Lacquer ware. There is a village known as “Ban Khoen, (a village of lacquer ware) in Tambon Haiya, Amphoe Mueang, Chiang Mai Province. “Khoen” ware is derived from a group of Khoen people who had migrated from Myanmar to settle down in the Chiang Mai area some 100 years ago. Major products include useful containers more than ornamental ones. Outstanding items are water containers, cigarette boxes, and betel nut sets, etc.

*Enamel Ware*: Enamel ware is another type of handicraft which is similarly made as neilloware. Expensive enamel ornaments are adorned with gems of various colours and can be applied to gold, copper, and bronze. In the old days enamel products such as food containers, spitoons were specially made for royalty, aristocrats, and high-ranking Buddhist monks.

*Ceramics*: Through the procedure of firing and glazing with various colours, ceramics is another traditional product. Besides pottery, the major products of ceramics include floor and mosaic tiles, sanitary ware, dining and kitchen ware, ornaments made of ceramics and other ceramic-related products such as containers. Since the Sukhothai
Period, ceramics had been known as *Sangkalok* or *Sukhothai Ware*. Due to popular demand from the consumers, the ceramics industry can be found in Lamphun, Lampang and Chiang Mai provinces.

*Mother-of-pearl Inlay Products*: Traditional, intricate handicraft, processed with the art of mother-of-pearl inlay is applied to objects. Lacquer is used as adhesive agent.

The beautified effect is created by the sparkling contrast of pinkish mother-of-pearl with the blend of the blackish “rak”. Items inlaid with mother–of-pearl are furniture, containers, trays, betel nut boxes, door and window panels of temples and palaces. Pearl carving is nowadays practised at Amphoe Mueang, Phra Nakhon Si Ayathaya Province. Moreover, in the south of Thailand, at Phuket, pearl carving has been applied in making utensils and souvenirs—most popular among visitors.

*Wood Ware*: The art of wood ware has been popular both as handicraft and as useful utensils. Decorations with wood carving of animal and plant motifs include temple buildings, doors, shutters and gables supporting the overhanging roofs. Moreover, there are other wood ware products for household objects such as beds, cupboards, mirror frames, tables, etc. Wood ware of old and new designs has been developed into outstanding products which are economically important to the export industry of Thailand. At present, the most reputed village for wood carving is “Thawai Village”, Hang Dong District, Chiang Mai Province.

*Basketry*: Known as home industry, basket-making has been important to the every day Thai life for quite a long period of time. This folk art which is in the form of souvenirs, can be classified into different types according to their usage, such as fish traps for catching aquatic animals, baskets, rice boxes, containers, mats and hats. The central part of Thailand is the site for good basketry.

*Silverware*: The northern part of Thailand is popular as the site for making silverware. Users of silverware are normally high-ranking dignitaries.
Souvenirs from Thailand

Examples of the OTOP collection

One Tambon One Product (OTOP) development strategy at sub-district level has been launched by the Royal Thai Government, as of the year 2004.

The spectrum of products that may serve as souvenirs is very broad. It reflects the great variety of local raw materials, the splendour of traditional crafts, the resourcefulness and skills of local people, and the appreciation of the Thai public themselves, first and foremost, and of more and more visitors to the kingdom.

Examples featured are those promoted through the OTOP strategy as characteristic of the country’s regions and provinces therein. As signalled through the name of the OTOP strategy, any such product is manufactured in a particular sub-district, called tambon in Thai.

The products introduced hereunder form a broad selection. Hence, travellers would be well advised to further explore treasures of this kind while visiting whichever locations.

From among the costume accessories, products such as lady hats and handbags manufactured using natural fibres by the farmers’ cooperative in Cha-am District, Phetchaburi Province, Central Thailand, are highlighted. Using the bamboo groves in their surroundings, villagers have, since long, made tools and utensils such as farmers’ hats shaped like an inverted basin, called ngop, fans, and fish traps. In Bang Pla Ma District
of Suphan Buri Province, Central Thailand, villagers have added the manufacturing of handbags, purses and hats. Villagers’ ingenuity has led to the manufacturing of objects using the fibres of the water hyacinth, which clogs rivers and lakes. Notably in Mukdahan Province, Northeastern Thailand, people harvest the plants, dry them in the sun, extract the fibres and twirl them into objects such as handbags and general-purpose boxes.

Brassware includes examples from four locations. At Ban Bu in the District of Bangkok Noi, Bangkok, bowls engraved with traditional ornamental patterns are manufactured. At Ban Tha Krayang of Lop Buri Province, Central Thailand, a centre of creating Buddha images, skilled craftspeople also produce charming figurines. Objects otherwise plaited from bamboo are made of brass at Ban Khlong Khut Mai of Mueang Chachoengsao District, Central Thailand. Yet another type, known as nielloware, consisting mostly of bowls, coasters and lids, comes from Nakhon Si Thammarat Province, Southern Thailand.

Apart from these ceramic products, those images are also imprinted on fabric. At the three locations of Ban
Chiang, Ban Kham O and Ban Pulu in Udon Thani Province, Northeastern Thailand, replicas are manufactured of such characteristic, famous archaeological finds as pots, bowls, vessels and vases with the ornamental decoration of the ancient Ban Chiang civilization. The finishing of the unique Bancharong porcelain is an artistic distinction of Samut Songkhram Province, Central Thailand.

Confections are virtually innumerable, given their great variety countrywide. Two specialties are described here. A variety of bananas is processed into two kinds of preserves, a confection similar to dried quince jelly called *kluai kuan* and fried, glazed banana slices called *kluai chap*. These sweets are prepared by the households of Ban Lan Dok Mai in Klom Phi of Kamphaeng Phet Province, Northern Thailand. In the same region, throughout the province of Nakhon Sawan, a confection known as *khanom mochi* – tiny, round cakes filled with bean paste, fruit preserve, or salted egg – are prepared.

The range of decorative artefacts is introduced by featuring select items. From the banks of the Moei River in Tak Province, Northwestern
Thailand, come artefacts made from jade such as ornate trees suitable for table-setting. The wetlands in the district of Ban Sang, Prachin Buri Province, Eastern Thailand, are the source of rushes that are harvested and processed by local craftspeople to weave mats and, using them as base material, manufacture as well such objects as dinner plate sets and tissue boxes. On Lanta Island in Krabi Province, Southern Thailand, craftspeople collect the leaves of a native pandan tree, known as toey panan. The dried and dyed fibres of its leaves are plaited into material with geometrical design and, then, worked into decorative objects such as pillow covers. People of Phang-nga Province, Southern Thailand, occupied with the cultivation of rubber trees and their tapping use the leaves as well, which they rub to loosen the membranes, making them translucent and colour them by dyeing to create beautiful, artificial blossoms. The manufacturing of prestigious artifacts such as ceremonial weapons, especially in the shape of the Malay dagger called kris, is a specialty of Yala Province, Southern Thailand. Reputedly all village households of Ban Si Than in Pa Tiu District, Yasothon Province, Northeastern Thailand, are engaged in the weaving of fabric that they use to produce triangular pillows, the so-called mon khit. The manufacturing of the popular suspended mobile, rooted in traditional skills, is upheld by people of Ban Hua Laem in Wasukri Sub-district and in Ban Ratana Chai of Pratu Chai District within the perimeter of the old city of Ayutthaya, Central Thailand. Inspired by the splendid boats built by local craftsmen and used by fishermen, households of Ban Pase Yawo in Pattani Province, Southern Thailand, manufacture lifelike miniature kolae boats.

Perhaps the most varied local product is fabric woven in marvelous designs, mostly using home-spun yarns and locally produced dyes. The
nine select examples are but dots on the country’s rich tapestry. Silk fabric of the elaborate mud mee variety, product of a weaving technique internationally known as ikat, a word borrowed from the Malay language, has earned the Phu Thai villagers of Ban Phon in Kalasin Province, Northeastern Thailand, a fine reputation. In the same region, the craftspeople of Chonnabot District in Khon Kaen Province are renown for their mud mee silk fabric. Using cotton yarn, villagers of Ban Thap Klai, Ban Thap Luang and Ban Na Ta Pho in Ban Rai District, Uthai Thani Province, Central Thailand, weave fabric in the stunning traditional patterns known as lai nak, lai khosue and lai manoi. Hand-woven as well is the fabric from the district of Ko Yo in Songkhla Province, Southern Thailand. Its superb design is known as lai rachawat. The pattern called lai nam lai, alluding to the flow of water, is characteristic of the Thai Lue, an ethnic group in Chiang Kham District of Phayao Province, Northern Thailand. In the same region, there at Ban Pa Sang and elsewhere in Lamphun Province, cotton dyed using natural substances is woven into fabric for the production of such household ware as table cloths, curtains and dinner plate sets. Hand-woven fabric using cotton or silk, dyed by using natural substances extracted from tree barks, known as pha khit and pha hom, comes from the villages of Ban Wa Bai and Ban Don Daeng in Akat Amnuay District of Sakon Nakhon Province, Northeastern Thailand. Batik cloth is created by highly skilled craftspeople in Narathiwat Province, Southern Thailand. Surin Province, Northeastern Thailand, is famous for the silk fabric of traditional designs.
and colour schemes that is woven by members of ethnic groups living in the sub-districts of Sam Kho and Hat Thokam Khawao Sinarin, Khawao Sinarin District, indicating some Khmer cultural heritage.

Beyond the many regional and local facets of the Thai cuisine, there are certain food items deemed highly special, three of which are included hereunder. Salted duck eggs from Chaiya District in Surat Thani Province are praised for their reddish yolk, deemed superior to duck eggs from anywhere else. They are produced in Chaiya District of Surat Thani Province, Southern Thailand.

Throughout the province of Chiang Rai, Northern Thailand, the locally grown tea leaves of the Mae Salong provenance are available, and a cup of fragrant tea brewed to order is served locally. Livestock products such as fresh milk and sun-dried beef as well as snacks have earned the area extending from Kaeng Khoi to Muak Lek in Sara Buri Province, Central Thailand nationwide recognition.

Given the abundance of fruits native to Thailand or successfully adopted, preservation and processing are common activities. Following are four exemplary fruit preserves. Sun-dried bananas from the area of Ban Krathum in Phitsanulok Province, Northern Thailand, are praised for their soft texture, natural sweetness and aromatic flavour. In the same region, there in the neighbouring province of Phetchabun, the sweet variety of tamarind called *makham wan* is processed to make juice, sun-dried fruit and a spiced preserve. In yet another neighbouring province, Phichit, households of the Pho Prathap Chang and Mueang districts developed a technique to
process the peel of almost ripe pomelo into a sweet-and-sour preserve shaped into toffees. ‘Lady-finger bananas’, either fresh or oven-dried, are specialties of two districts in Chumphon Province, Southern Thailand, namely, Tha Sae and Lang Suan.

Throughout the kingdom, locally woven fabric is used to produce garments. The one example introduced here is the variety of distinctive garments made by members of the numerous ethnic hill tribe groups in Mae Hong Son Province, Northern Thailand. Singled out for their wider popularity are garments produced by the Karen in Mae Sariang District.

To fittingly present souvenirs such as those featured here, gift boxes complete with ribbons and rosettes come handy. Households in Pran Buri District of Prachuap Khiri Khan Province, Central Thailand, have developed techniques and skills to make cardboard and paper from pineapple fibre and to manufacture wrapping materials as well.

In presenting examples of jewellery, two centres of local industries are featured. One is the country’s biggest concentration of precious as well as semi-precious stone deposits in Chanthaburi Province, Eastern Thailand, where also the trading and gem cutting enterprises are centred. Unique gold ornaments designed in the traditional style and enamelled in red, green and blue are created by the goldsmiths in the Si Satchanalai District of Sukhothai Province, Northern Thailand.

Puppets have traditionally been a salient feature of the performing arts. The celebrated small marionettes known as hun krabok chiu, used in the theatrical staging of episodes from classical Thai literature, consist of ceramic heads and elaborate textile costumes. Such splendid puppets are created by craftspeople in the area of Chong Non Si in the Yannawa District, Bangkok. Using wood to craft puppets and building on traditional skills, manufacturers in Mueang
District of Nakhon Pathom Province, Central Thailand, have ventured into contemporary designs such as fighting Thai boxers frozen in motion.

Fine specimens of timeless silverware in the traditional style are created by a group of silversmiths, using techniques ascribed to the Laos, at Ban Pa Klang of Pua District, Nan Province, Northern Thailand, and in the provincial town proper.

The country’s lush vegetation has given rise to the use of all sorts of plant material for the making of wickerwork. Using strings of a strong vine called *thao wan*, households at Kut Wai in the town of Si Sa Ket, Northeastern Thailand, work baskets for flower arrangements and fruit baskets. Well-known as a centre of assorted wickerwork that is useful, not to say indispensable for good housekeeping, is the district of Phanat Nikhom in Chon Buri Province, Eastern Thailand, whose products are displayed in markets throughout the area.

Unusual objects carved from wood or bamboo, different from the ubiquitous products, are represented by two examples. The chosen sample of wood-carvings is made using the wood of a pine tree called *thep tharo*, traditionally carved to create Buddha images or animal figurines. Craftspeople of Huai Yot District in Trang Province, Southern Thailand, have added objects such as attractively shaped and embellished vases. The corresponding sample of carved bamboo comes from Nakhon Nayok Province, Central Thailand. There, some craftspeople use bamboo root sections, left over after cutting poles, to carve the likeness of human heads complete with facial features, or images of hermits, or else bird figures such as peacocks. These are displayed for sale along the routes leading to local waterfalls.
Topographical Orientation

Historically, earliest evidence of culture, especially Thai culture within the boundaries of contemporary Thailand, exists in the intra-mountain valleys which gave rise to virtually independent and semi-independent realms, at times. There, distinct ancient cultural traits evolved which have been handed down to the present.

Situated on the banks of four rivers, or nearby, are centres of historical realms flanked by mountain ranges. To the west is the city of Chiang Mai, now an urban sprawl on the banks of the Ping River and, at close distance, the town of Lamphun situated on the Kuang River, a tributary of the Ping River. In the lower centre of the headwater area, though separated by high mountains, is the city of Lampang on the banks of the Wang River. Upstream on the banks of the Yom River lie the town of Phayao and midstream the town of Phrae. The eastern and largest of the four river basins, the one of the Nan River, has in its upstream section, the town of Nan.

Although geographically somewhat isolated, distinct traditions constitute what is known as the Lan Na Culture, the civilization of the Thai based on the cultivation of millions [lan] of paddy fields [na]. Irrigated agriculture in some valleys has been practised by People’s Irrigation Groups that have operated for close to 800 years, throughout the history of the Lan Na Thai kingdoms and
until the present. Prosperity gave rise
to local centres of power, adorned
with monasteries. In certain locations,
older monuments of different cultures
exist, most of which were absorbed
by the dominant Thai culture. All this
was blended with influences from
neighbouring regions, resulting in
the formation of the Lan Na culture.

At higher altitude, in the perspec-
tive from the densely populated and
intensively worked valley lands,
farther away in the hills and mountains,
small ethnic groups call it home.
While some such populations
including the Lawa or Lua and the
M’rabi or “Phi Tong Luang” [Spirits
of the Yellow Leaves] are indigenous,
others have steadily migrated south-
ward into the northern headwater
mountains and well beyond. These
numerically larger populations include
the Karen, H’mong or Meo, Lahu or
Mussur, Yao or Mian, Lisu and
Akha, each comprising between two
and several subgroups that are
outwardly and, hence, most easily
distinguished by their colourful
attire. All this resulted in a symbiosis
of lowlanders and uplanders as well
as a demographic stratification, in
the sheer sense of the word, by levels
of altitude.

In the course of unification of the
northern mountain area, the centres
of the power that built the unified
Lan Na Thai Kingdom, was shifted
from Chiang Saen to Chiang Rai
and, upon the subjugation of the
Hariphunchai Kingdom and its
centre Lamphun, onward to Chiang
Mai. From there, the sphere of
influence and supremacy was
expanded to include those valleys in
which the towns of Lampang,
Phayao, Nan and Phrae are located.
Wat Phra That Hariphunchai, Lamphun Province
LAMPHUN – A NORTHERN HISTORICAL REALM WITH DVARAVATI CULTURAL HERITAGE

The historically oldest settlement is likely the town of Lamphun, once the capital of the Hariphunchai Kingdom. Testimonials are the highly esteemed monasteries, edifices and sculptures created in the Dvaravati Period and preserved to this day. Traces of the Dvaravati Culture are also found in small towns such as Chiang Saen and Chiang Khong.

The Mon people, also referred to by the name of Raman, who inhabited some valleys many centuries ago, have blended into the contemporary Thai population, with the sole exception of the dwindling number of Lawa people, some of whom still speak their native vernacular, a variant of the Mon language.

As historically evident, at the site of the present-day town of Lamphun a realm had come into existence that led to the founding of a fortified centre of power named Hariphunchai, in the 7th century.1 This was the capital of the kingdom of the same name for six centuries, ruled by 49 monarchs. The oldest preserved edifice is the square-shaped base of the gold-plated Mae Krua Chedi, also known as Chedi Chang Yan, a rare example of the Chiang Saen-style with Sivichayan elements, dating from the end of the 9th century. It is near yet somewhat hidden away from the complex of the monastery named Wat Phra That Hariphunchai Wara Maha Wihan. Its nine-tiered umbrella flanking the centrally placed, gilded chedi, is made of gold. Also, there are five pagodas or chedi built in the Sri Lankan style. The compound of this monastery in its present physical appearance was established in the year 1044 and restored in 1433.

Of similar importance is the monastery named Wat Chammathewi, locally called Wat Ku Kut. It was constructed in 1218 and modelled after a highly venerated reliquary at the ancient site of Polonnaruwa on the island of Sri Lanka. It is deemed the last surviving example of temple architecture in the authentic Dvaravati Style. Its earliest remaining structures are two chedi, one octagonal and the other square, dating from the

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1 All historical data, i.e. years and centuries, refer to the chronology of the Western Calendar.
late 12th to early 13th centuries. The octagonal chedi rises to a gently rounded peak and has a single tier of eight niches, each with one Buddha statue of outstanding beauty. The square chedi rises like a pyramid of five tiers. Each tier has 12 niches containing standing Buddha images which decrease in size, tier by tier, giving the illusion of great height. This chedi is recognized as the work of Mon artisans of the Dvaravati Period. Moreover, this monastery is a testimonial to the reign of Queen Chammathewi of Hariphunchai, around the turn of the 7th century.

To commemorate her coronation, five monasteries were built of which Wat Mahawan Wanaram still exists. It is located in Mueang District of Lamphun Province. A stone inscription dating from the 12th century relates teachings of Lord Buddha in the Mon and Pali languages. It is preserved by the Hariphunchai National Museum in Lamphun Town.
CHIANG SAEN – A NORTHERN HISTORICAL REALM WITH LAN NA CULTURAL HERITAGE

On the western banks of the Mekong River, in modern-day Chiang Rai Province, are two ancient sites. The one situated on a hill named Doi Chiang Miang is dated as of the middle of the 8th century. The other, known as Wiang Hiranya Nakhon Ngoen Yang has remnants of moats enclosing about 70 hectares. It renders evidence of an early power centre which is thought to have been founded in the latter half of the 9th century. Historical records refer to the conquest by Khmer invaders of the town of Yonok Nakhaphan, early in the 10th century, during the reign of the 32nd king of the Singhanawat Dynasty, and to the relief of the town after some 20 years of occupation by the Khmer invaders, upon which its name was changed to Chai Buri.

Given the history of this area, Chiang Khong and Chiang Saen probably existed as settlements by the time when the latter was established as a town, in 1328. It is the oldest town in the North and one of the oldest in present-day Thailand as well. The monastery named Wat Phra That Chom Kittı likely dates from the 10th century. The oldest preserved chedi in the town was built.
in 1295. It is in the complex of the attractive monastery named Wat Pa Sak. The huge, octagonal *chedi* of Wat Phra That Chedi Luang was built in 1331; its present shape dates from reconstruction undertaken in 1551. The main monastery of Chiang Khong, Wat Luang, dates from the 13th century.

The realm of Chiang Saen, along with Chiang Khong, was absorbed into the Lan Na Kingdom, in 1334. A major old temple in Chiang Saen called Wat Yia has a bronze Buddha image of the earliest Chiang Saen style, which is considered the most valuable and beautiful of its kind in Thailand. This monastery had a *chedi* which was struck by lightning in 1494. Cracks on the surface of a Buddha image covered with plaster revealed its core made from jasper, an opaque cryptocrystalline quartz of rare splendour. This image has become famous and highly venerated as the *Emerald Buddha*. Hence, that old monastery as well as those ever housing this most precious image, in succession, are commonly referred to as *Wat Phra Kaeo*, a monastery housing the *Emerald Buddha*. 
CHIANG RAI – A NORTHERN HISTORICAL REALM WITH LAN NA CULTURAL HERITAGE

The centre of power was shifted southward upon the founding of the town of Chiang Rai by King Mengrai, a Thai Yuan ruler, in 1261, and renamed Chiang Tung, in 1262. An older chedi in the precinct of the monastery named Wat Ngam Mueang, situated on the hilltop of Doi Ngam Mueang in Mueang District, constructed in 1318, holds the ashes of the father of King Mengrai. Towards the end of the 14th century, the monastery of Wat Phra Sing and the one later named Wat Phra Kaeo were built, upon the relocation of the Buddha image known as the Emerald Buddha from its former abode in Chiang Saen. Ancient kilns and terracotta artefacts found in Wiang Ka Long Sub-district of Wiang Pa Pao District in Chiang Rai Province shed light on the long tradition of local arts and crafts.

In the course of expanding his realm toward the west to include the headwater areas of the Ping, Ing and Khok Rivers and their upstream valleys, King Mengrai founded the town of Fang, in 1268. In these valleys, a unique mode of agricultural water supply for paddy production was already practised. Known as mueang fai, this practice was embodied in a distinct Lan Na Law dating from the year 1296. Accordingly, water users themselves have managed their irrigation scheme of channels, mueang, and barrages, fai, over the centuries, to this day. In recent years, this system referred to as “people’s irrigation management” in the hydraulic engineering literature, has been recognized as a viable, even superior alternative to management by agencies. It was adopted for some newly established, modern irrigation systems in several countries of Asia.
CHIANG MAI – A NORTHERN HISTORICAL REALM WITH LAN NA CULTURAL HERITAGE

The fall of the Hariphunchai Kingdom was caused by the rise of an eventually much larger and more powerful kingdom known as Lan Na, the first Thai kingdom to straddle valleys and mountains of the North, far and wide. On Hariphunchai territory, King Mengrai had the construction of the town of Wiang Kum Kam completed by 1294. However, the capital of the expanding kingdom had to be relocated onto higher ground so as to safeguard it against seasonal inundation. In 1296, by royal command a new city was founded. This city [chiang] was to become the new [mai] capital of the Lan Na Kingdom, known as Chiang Mai ever since.

In the vicinity of the new capital city were two monasteries built earlier, which continued to exist to this day, namely, Wat Umong dating from around 1280, the

King Mengrai Monument
oldest in the region, and Wat Suan Dok, founded in 1283 and famous for its 500 year-old image called Phra Chao Kao Tue. Within the perimeter of the now historical town centre of Chiang Mai, Wat Chiang Man is the oldest monastery with a Buddha Sila image thought to be from Northern India, created in the 6th century.

Until the conquest by Burmese invaders in 1558, altogether 18 kings of the Mengrai Dynasty ruled the Lan Na Kingdom. Monasteries adorning the towns, villages and hills increased in numbers to some 300 by the middle of the 16th century, of which 36 monasteries were situated within the ancient city walls of Chiang Mai Town. One of the most beautiful is Wat Phra That Si Chom Thong Wara Wihan, founded in 1451. It is famous for its gilded chedi built in 1451 and its mid-16th century ubosot. Of particular historical significance is Wat Maha Photharam, also known as Wat Chet Yot, modelled after the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodgaya, Northern India, and built in 1455. Its seven-spired pagoda or chedi with beautiful bas-reliefs, created during the Golden Age of the Lan Na Kingdom, is considered the prototype of present-day sacrosanct architecture. This monastery was the venue of the Eighth Buddhist World Council held to revise the Tripitaka and hosted by King Tilokaracha in the year 1477.

In the course of history, ever more territories were incorporated into the Lan Na Kingdom which expanded its supremacy toward the east, including the realms of Phayao, Lampang, Nan and Phrae. Events were recorded through stone inscriptions in fak kham characters such as the one of 1493 at Wat Phra Kaeo in the town of Chiang Rai.
Wat Chiang Man in Chiang Mai

Wat Chet Yot in Chiang Mai
Lampang – A Northern Historical Realm with Lan Na Cultural Heritage

The realm of Lampang, dating from the 7th century, with its ancient capital founded late in the 7th century and expanded early in the 8th century, became part of the Lan Na Kingdom in 1301. At the site of an ancient fortress to the south of Lampang Town, dating from the 8th century, the walled monastery of Wat Phra That Lampang Luang was built in the 11th century. It is deemed one of the highlights of the period art throughout Southeast Asia. Standing on a hillock in rural environs, this monastery is located in Lampang Luang Sub-district of Ko Kha District, Lampang Province.

Among the monasteries in present-day Lampang City is Wat Phra Kaew Don Tao Suchadaram Wara Wihan. There, the Buddha image known as the Emerald Buddha was enshrined during the years 1436 until 1468, after it had been taken from its abode in Chiang Rai Town and before it was moved to Chiang
Mai. The monastery has a *chedi* which serves as a reliquary for a hair of the Buddha. This edifice is decorated with shingles made from copper and coated with pure gold, an artefact known in Thai as *changko*. Other outstanding examples of the Lan Na style include two monasteries, one in the town and another located in a rural setting. Wat Sela Rattana Paphhataram, also known as Wat Lai Hin Kaew Chang Phueak or Wat Lai Hin Luang Kaeo Chang Yuen, in Lai Hin Sub-district of Ko Kha District, was founded in the 13th century. The design and ornamentation of its *vihara* were created by artisans from Chiang Tung, the name by which Chiang Rai was known in that period. The magnificent mural paintings match the superb architectural design, embellished by stucco ornaments in front of the *vihara* which are considered some of the best in the North. In its very old library palm leaf manuscripts are preserved, which were manufactured and written more than 500 years ago. The ‘gem’ that is Wat Pong Yang Kok exemplifies the sacrosanct, early architectural style of Lan Na at its best. The ensemble of its airy *vihara* with its teak poles underpinning the tiled roof and its splendid interior, featuring blossoms and gilded fowl as well as *mandalas* and *bodhi* tree frescoes, is enchanting. That very old wooden *vihara* was built during the reign of Queen Chammathewi of Hariphunchai, purportedly in the year 710. This most ancient Buddhist sanctuary is located in Pong Yang Kok Sub-district of Hang Chat District.
An ancient settlement preceded the re-establishment, in 1096, of Phayao as the capital of a small kingdom. It has more stone inscriptions than found anywhere else in Lan Na, most of them dating from the 12th – 14th centuries, of which 110 such historical documents are preserved at Wat Si Khom Kham alone, which was built in the 12th century. This monastery houses a Buddha image which was created over a span of four decades, from late in the 15th to early in the 16th century. It is deemed the largest image in Northern Thailand, which gave the monastery its alternative name of Wat Phra Chao Ton Luang.

In the Phayao Realm, a town known by the name of Wiang Ta Wang Tong, or else called Wiang Pratu Chai, prospered in the late 15th century and early 16th century. To this day, solely the monastery of Wat Li, located in Mueang District, has remained with a chedi in the Lan Na style and an inscription dating its foundation as of the year 1495. Three more, equally important inscriptions at Wat Phra Koet, Wat Sipsong Hong and Wat Suwannaram date from the years 1513 to 1515. The monastery called Wat Pa Daeng Bunnak, built around the turn of the 16th century, is considered the first one where the merit-making ritual known as salakpat has been practised. Upon the long reign of Phaya Ngam Mueang (1258-1298), the ninth king of the Lawa Chang Racha royal family, Phayao became part of the Lan Na Kingdom.
NAN – A NORTHERN HISTORICAL REALM WITH LAN NA CULTURAL HERITAGE

The origin of the town and realm of Nan is traced back to the ancient settlement of Ban Pua. There, all that has remained to the present are some chedi built on rectangular, four-tiered bases during the reign of Queen Chammathewi of Hariphunchai, at the turn of the 7th century, on which Buddha statues are placed that blend Lan Na, Lan Chang and Nan artistic features. These ancient edifices are situated in the monastery named Wat Phaya Wat in Du Tai Sub-district of Mueang District.

Another very old monastery is Wat Suan Tan, founded around the year 1230 and located in Mueang District. It has an old, beautifully shaped chedi with gateways pointing to the four quarters and houses in its vihara a huge bronze Buddha statue cast in 1450 and named Phra Chao Thong Thip.

The town of Nan, as it exists today, was founded in the year 1368, at a site not far from the site of the
ancient town of Nan, where the monastery of Wat Phra That Chae Haeng had been built in 1355. Remnants of the city wall built in 1426 are still in place. By then, the Nan Realm had become part of the Lan Na Kingdom. The monastery of Wat Phra That Chang Kham Wara Wihan, located in Mueang district, was built in 1406 and formerly known as Wat Luang or Wat Luang Klang Wiang. In 1955, a 145-centimetre tall walking Buddha image made of pure gold was discovered, after the plaster covering the image had cracked. An inscription in that monastery dated 1548 relates, in Lan Na characters, the history of Nan as an independent kingdom during the 13th and 14th centuries. Unique is the structure of the monastery named Wat Phumin, situated in Mueang District. Its centrepiece is a single building with four porticos encompassing the ubosot and vihara as well as the central chedi. In the main hall, four Buddha statues are placed back-to-back. It was built around the year 1585 and restored late in the Fourth Reign [1851-1868]. By then, its walls were decorated with mural paintings which depict Buddhist legends as well as local folklore.
PHRAE – A NORTHERN HISTORICAL REALM WITH LAN NA CULTURAL HERITAGE

Situated on the banks of the Yom River, in its mid-stream section, the ancient town called Mueang Phon Nakhon was founded in the year 828. Legend has it that the monastery of Wat Phra That Si Don Kham, locally called Wat Huai O and situated in Huai O Sub-district of Long District, was founded in the 6th century when the land was part of the Hariphunchai Kingdom.

Early in the town’s history its name was changed to Phrae. An octagonal chedi in the Chiang Saen style with the Buddha image called Phra Chao Than Chai, situated on top of the nearby hill of Doi Kosiyatchak, is thought to signify the founding of Phrae. Its city wall is more than 1,100 years old, shaped like a conch and of impressive proportions, with a height of seven metres, a width of 15 metres and a length of 4,000 metres, complete with four fortresses that served as gates, and surrounded by a 20-metre wide moat. As evident from preserved monuments the town was built in the 12th century. One such historical precinct is Wat Luang in Mueang District. Almost as old is Wat Phra That Cho Hae in Cho Hae Sub-district of Mueang District, built during the years 1336 and 1338. In its Chiang Saen-style chedi a relic of the Buddha is enshrined. It was built of brick and covered with brass shingles.
LAN NA THAI CULTURAL RESILIENCE DURING TURMOIL

How precarious the situation was for the Lan Na Kingdom, wedged between emerging neighbouring powers, one might sense from the fact that the town of Lamphun, in close vicinity of the city of Chiang Mai, underwent major reinforcement of its fortification. In 1552, Lamphun was reconstructed complete with a city pillar, lak mueang, walls with a three-metre high stone base topped by bricks shaped like bodhi tree leaves, six gates and a moat.

Soon after, in 1556 the city of Chiang Mai, capital of the Lan Na Kingdom, was conquered by Burmese invaders who stayed to rule supreme until 1774. The Lan Na Kingdom continued to exist as a vassal territory of Burma. In the same year, the city of Lampang and its realm fell to the Burmese invaders. By 1558, the Burmese had occupied the principality of Nan and held it until 1786. At last, the Burmese seized Chiang Saen in 1588 and held it until 1804.

During two centuries of Burmese supremacy, the Lan Na culture withstood the onslaught. The city of Chiang Mai served as the centre of the vassal territory. Buddhist monasteries were established such as the unique monastery of Wat Phumin in Nan, built around the year 1585 and one of the most beautiful in Northern Thailand, with its vihara featuring splendid murals, and Wat Phra Phuttha Bat Tak Pha of Lamphun, built in 1657. In the 17th century, the beautiful Ku Chao Ya Sutta was created, an ornamental wall at the monastery named Wat Khok Kaeo in Na Kaeo Sub-district of Ko Kha District in Lampang Province. A stone inscription in fak kham characters at Wat Chiang Man of Chiang Mai City, dated 1681, tells of the founding of Chiang Mai in 1296. A group of Thai Yai, also known as Shan, who had settled in Phayao Town, built Wat Nantaram, also called Wat Chong Ka or Wat Chong Nuea. Another monastery in Phayao, Wat Si Khom Kham constructed in the Lan Na style, in 1761, houses the image named Phra Chao Ton Luang, the biggest of its kind in the former Lan Na Kingdom.

Fak kham characters
EMERGING NORTHERN THAILAND

With the resurrection of the Kingdom of Siam, the Burmese occupation of territories once forming the Lan Na Kingdom was brought to an end. Compelled by rebellion and uprising, and finally defeated on the battlefield, the Burmese occupants withdrew from Chiang Mai in 1774 and from Nan in 1786. Burmese forces were driven out of Lampang in 1787 and ultimately out of Chiang Saen, which was razed to the ground in 1804, to be rebuilt only in 1874. The necessity of safeguarding against retaliation has remained evident from the construction of the big Amok Fort of Lampang, built in 1807 and preserved almost intact.

The various territories were brought under the suzerainty of Siam, and large-scale reconstruction of the war-ravaged areas began. Nan, for example, became a Siamese vassal state in 1788. Wat Phumin, its famous monastery, was restored in 1867 and chosen to house four large Sukhothai-style Buddha statues. The governor’s residence in Phrae, built in 1892, is one of the most splendid period-buildings in Thailand. Its design blends Thai style with European features. Nan was fully integrated into Siam in the year 1931, shortly thereafter followed by Chiang Mai in 1939.

ETHNIC DIVERSITY

Wars waged to gain or regain control over the northern valleys, foremost, had caused devastation and, worst of all, decimated the population, time and again. In periods of peace, reconstruction of settlements and rehabilitation of the economy were high priorities. To secure the required human resources, entire population groups were settled in the lands of the former Lan Na Kingdom.

Throughout the history of the Lan Na Kingdom, some of the many ethnic Thai groups in Mainland Southeast Asia settled in particular locations. Examples are the Thai Yuan, the group to which King Mengrai himself belonged, and the Thai Lue. To this day, Thai Yuan people in Mae Chaem District of Chiang Mai Province have upheld their cultural heritage such as producing the pha tin chok, their homespun and hand-woven cotton
fabric with rhombic design. Thai Lue hailing from Sip Song Pan Na, a region inhabited by native Thai people in today’s Yunnan Province of China, settled in the Lan Na Kingdom, there in locations of the present-day provinces of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Lamphun, Lampang, Phrae, Nan and Phayao. During the two centuries of Burmese occupation especially groups of ethnic Thai from Upper Burma known as Thai Yai or Shan settled in the territory of the Lan Na Thai, there in areas such as around Chiang Mai and Phayao.
Beginning with the incorporation into Siam and, then, modern Thailand, the need for human resources triggered the settling of more of the closely related ethnic Thai groups. They include Thai Lue, now at home in Chiang Rai Province, at Ban Si Don Chai in Chiang Khong District; in Nan Province, at Nong Bua; in Phayao Province, and in Lampang Province, in Kluai Phae Sub-district of Mueang District and Mae Tha District. Thai Yong settled in large numbers in the provinces of Lamphun and Chiang Mai. Nowadays, the descendants of the Yong immigrants make up 80 percent of the population of Lamphun. They are well-known for their skills in handicrafts and artisanship. Where the Thai Yong live, the Thai Khoen are not far. The Thai Khoen have expertise in operating terraced agriculture. The Thai Phuan, settling in communities in Phrae Province, are descendants of immigrants from areas in present-day Laos. The large population of Thai Won in Nan Province, who are farmers settling along the Nan River, are said to hail from areas to the east of the Mekong River.

In the 1950s, a large group of Chinese having sided with the Kuomintang, the nationalists defeated by the communists, also called Haw, were granted refuge in the area of Mae Salong, in the present-day sub-districts of Mae Salong Nai and Mae Salong Nok of Mae Fa Luang District in Chiang Rai Province. Recently, that area was renamed Santi Khiri. Nearby is the Doi Tung Royal Villa, erstwhile residence of H.R.H. the Princess Mother.

By moving into the said hill and mountain area, those Chinese refugees emulated how the native people in the hills and mountains of Mainland Southeast Asia have been advancing their settlements in north-south direction, over the centuries. The scattered distribution of these indigenous people, though increasingly also in the valleys, is best distinguished and illustrated with a view to their distinctive attire. The H’mong, also called Miao or Meo, Lisu and Karen formed clusters of settlements in Mae Taeng District, the Lisu and Karen around Doi Chiang Dao in Chiang Dao District, and the Mian, also known as Yao, as well as Karen, Lahu and Lisu around the town of Fang, their trading centre, all these locations in Chiang Mai.
Province. Akha settlements, typically situated on mountain ridges, are concentrated in Mae Suai and Wiang Pa Pao districts of Chiang Rai Province. The latter district is also home to Lisu. Groups of Mian or Yao, settled in villages on mountain ridges some 50 years ago, have earned themselves a reputation as hard-working farmers successfully producing rice, corn and potatoes, supplemented by animal husbandry such as raising horses, pigs and chicken.
The integration of the people of the hills into the mainstream society and economy results from the manifold initiatives and interventions by H. M. King Bhumibol Adulyadej, embodied in the ventures of the Royal Development Study Centre at Huai Hong Khrai in Doi Saket District and various royal projects, all located in Chiang Mai Province. One such project is the Royal Agricultural Station at Doi Ang Khang in the high-mountain area of Mae Sun and Mon Pin Sub-districts of Fang District, where cool-climate fruit and flower species were introduced to substitute for the earlier, customary poppy cropping. The Doi Inthanon Royal Project in Huai Luang Sub-district of Chom Thong District promotes vegetable and flower cultivation. Similar crops are grown at the Huai Phak Phai Royal Project, also known as Thung Roeng, at Ban Mae Ha in Ban Pong Sub-district of Hang Dong District. Likewise, the Huai Luek Royal Project in Ping Khong Sub-district of Chiang Dao District introduced the production of vegetables and fruits. The Queen Sirikit Botanical Garden, situated along the Mae Rim – Samoeng Road, is dedicated to research and conservation. Through experimentation, technology transfer, demonstration, and systematic introduction of feasible, alternative field and tree cropping, substitutes for poppy cultivation have been accepted and adopted. As a result, the once notorious Golden Triangle was transformed from a hotbed of the illicit production of drugs as well as related dealing and wheeling into an area of ecologically sound, innovative agriculture. Moreover, it has become a prime tourism destination, owing to the scenic setting at such spots as Sam Liam Thong Kham at Ban Sop Ruak, where the three countries of Thailand, Myanmar and Laos meet, near Chiang Saen in Chiang Rai Province.

The Queen Sirikit Botanical Garden
Lesser known ethnic groups, native to the hills and mountains, include the Lu’a, also known as Lawa, settled in the foothills. Examples are the districts of Wiang Nong Long and Pa Sang in Lamphun Province and of Ban Mae Hia as well as Suthep sub-districts of Mueang District in Chiang Mai Province. The language of the Lu’a or Lawa belongs to the Austro-Asiatic group of Mon-Khmer languages, indicating a distant relationship with the historical regional centre of Lawo, the former capital city of a Dvaravati Kingdom and present-day Lop Buri City in Central Thailand. In the mountains of Nan Province, small groups of Khamu and Khin, also called Khin and sometimes identified as Lawa, have survived. They, too, speak languages of Mon-Khmer affinity. The Khin or Lawa live in villages at high altitude, most of them in Chaloem Phra Kiat District, and fewer in the districts of Bo Kluea, Pua, Thung Chang and Chiang Klang. The Khamu are at home, for the last 200 years, in the border area of Thailand and Laos. The group of Khamu living in Thailand is known as Kha Khwaen; their villages are in the northernmost districts of Nan Province. The truly most exotic ethnic group is that of the M’ra Bri, also referred to as M’rabi or M’labi yet commonly known as the Phi Tong Lueang, the Spirits of the Yellow Leaves. Their
number in remote, forested areas of Wiang Sa and Ban Luang districts in Nan Province was estimated at about 100 members, and in Song District of Phrae Province at about 40 members. The M’rabi are forest nomads who rest in makeshift shelters roofed with banana leaves. As soon as these leaves dry up, turn yellow and begin to disintegrate, such shelter would become useless and, therefore, be abandoned. Hence, they are referred to as the Spirits of the Yellow Leaves.

The chequered tapestry of ethnic groups, their topographical spread across valleys, hills and mountains, the physical stratification of their settlements and land base for productive activities by altitude, their cultural heritage and its preservation have brought about and kept alive a rich diversity. It is no wonder, after all, that the concentration of ethnic diversity that is encountered in both the lowlands and the uplands, within a relatively small geographical area, and the great variety of locally created artefacts, in particular, have stimulated interest and admiration by the people of Thailand, on the whole, and visitors from abroad alike.

As stated in a document published by the Office of the National Culture Commission, “all these ethnic groups are fully assimilated and consider themselves Thais.”

Mae Fa Luang Gardens, Doi Tung, Chiang Rai Province

The morning sea of mist in Chiang Rai
**Topographical Orientation**

Four major rivers sustain steadily broadening plains, crossed by their tributaries, and ultimately converge to funnel their vital waters into a vast wetland, known as Bueng Boraphet, which overflows into the main stream of Thailand’s central plain, the Chao Phraya River. To the east, separated by a mountain range, flows the fifth major river, named Pa Sak River, through a comparatively narrow valley, ultimately to converge with the Chao Phraya River as well.

Rivers were lifelines in several aspects. They and their tributaries provided reliable water supply to fulfill human requirements for water, served as a source of food stuff, and facilitated crop production and animal husbandry. Rivers were the earliest lines of communication and transportation, linking river banks as well as upstream, midstream and downstream sections. Rivers also provided water that was needed to keep intruders at bay, by making use of their natural course, by diverting water into canals and ditches, and by keeping moats filled. Beyond being used as sources of supply, directly through water use and indirectly by navigating boats loaded with commodities, and as defensive means, rivers also facilitated the flushing out of effluents and disposing of waste.

The comparatively large plains around the downstream sections of the Ping, Wang, Yom and Nan rivers and the elongated plain of the Pa Sak River had been settled early in history. Their sheer expanse facilitated the formation of larger territorial units than did narrow valleys. In contrast to river estuaries and coastal areas, the midstream and downstream plains of those five rivers were much less exposed to health hazards such as lethal diseases endemic to marshy and swampy regions. Settlements in airy surroundings on higher and firm ground offered a good measure of

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**Cradle of Historical Siam**

Northern River Plains and Mountain Flanks
protection from malaria, to name only one such threat. The alluvial downstream region formed a buffer zone and, thus, enhanced security and safety. This had especial relevance with regard to invaders and pirates.

Traces of human habitat in the form of well laid-out settlements, early in history, attest to the awareness of unique opportunities inherent to the physical endowment of the said four river mid-stream and downstream sections, namely, Ping, Wang, Yom and Nan, and of the valley of the Pa Sak River.

Following the path of the sun, ancient sites of settlements that were the seats of might wielding power over large areas are called up from east to west.

MONUMENTS AND ARTEFACTS
TRACED TO EARLY HISTORY
UPTO THE 13TH CENTURY
DVARAVATI, LAN NA,
AND KHMER CULTURES

Near the east bank of the Pa Sak River, about mid-stream around the confluence of the Hiang River, are the historical town of Si Thep and nearby ancient sites, nowadays in the south of Phetchabun Province. The two oldest remains are called Khao Klang Nai and Khao Thamoratana, both dating from the 5th to 7th centuries\(^1\) and belonging to the Dvaravati Period. Artefacts found through archaeological excavations in the 1930s include the very beautiful statues of a style that reflects the transition from the Dvaravati to the

\(^1\) All historical data, i.e. years and centuries, refer to the chronology of the Western Calendar.
Khmer epoch; they are preserved in the National Museum, Bangkok. The third ancient site, some kind of layers-upon-layers, is Si Thep. Today, this former regional centre of the Khmer Empire from the 9th century onward is a ruined city, girded by two concentric walls and moats. Numerous ponds, remnants of gates and five monasteries, terraces and the edifices known as Prang Si Thep and Prang Song Phi Nong, some situated inside, others outside the city walls, indicate that Si Thep was densely populated until the 13th century, when the Khmer rulers deserted it. The Shivalingam of Si Thep was transferred and consecrated as foundation stone in the City Pillar Shrine of the present-day town of Phetchabun. There, the monument of King Pha Muang, ruler of the realm of Rat, commemorates the alliance through which the town of Sukhothai was relieved from Khmer occupation and the Thai realm of Sukhothai established.

In the mountainous headwater area of a major mid-stream tributary of the Nan River, in Nakhon Thai District of Phitsanulok Province, there is archaeological evidence of an ancient settlement in the valleys of the Kok Yai River and its tributaries.

Si Thep Historical Park
named Om Sing, Nam Phrik and Nam Khamuen. Not only are there murals in the Kangkhao Chang Luang Cave and on the Keed Cliff but also the ancient monasteries called Wat Klang Si Pruettham, Wat Nuea and Wat Hua Rong. Finds include ancient Buddha images, earthenware and coins.

Further downstream on the Nan River, where the Yom River runs in parallel at close distance and the wide plain is crisscrossed by tributaries of both rivers and dotted with wetlands, is the area where the ancient town of Nakhon Chaibovorn, also known as Ban Kontanyakam, or else as Mueang Pak Yom, was located. Evidence includes moats encircling an area of about five square kilometers with mounds that supposedly are remnants of a chapel and of part of the city wall. Among the inhabitants of the ancient city, which is praised as beautifully built, referred to as sunthorn which is synonymous with phichit, lived Brahmans, as recorded in an inscription in the Khmer language that was excavated at the Phra That Chedi of Wat Phra Si Rattana Maha That, its deserted monastery.

The physical environment of the historical sites of Sukhothai, Si Satchanalai and Chaliang appears predestined for the establishment of settlements. The Yom River served as the lifeline and thoroughfare for waterborne transportation. The plain at its mid-section is sufficiently wide for extensive land use, with numerous tributaries as the vital water resources flowing from the nearby western mountains and hills. Among the historical monuments are several which originated from the period of Khmer dominance in this area.

Si Satchanalai Historical Park, Sukhothai Province
The ruins of Chaliang belong to a Khmer settlement dating from the reign of King Jayavarman VII (1181-1220), ruler of the Khmer Empire, with its capital Angkor. Predating the city of Si Satchanalai, the site of Chaliang likely was established as a staging post. Its laterite shrine of Wat Chao Chan was built in the Bayon style as a Mahayana Buddhist structure. Nearby is the Wat Lak Mueang, a small, Khmer-style sanctuary with the city’s foundation pillar.

At the historical site of Sukhothai, Wat Chom Chuen is assumed to be the most ancient structure, originally of Khmer style, owing to twelve human skeletons dating from around the year 200 and features of the Khmer-style tower or prang among its large number of 7th century stupas or chedi. The edifice known as San Ta Pha Daeng is a Khmer sanctuary that once housed sandstone Hindu icons, built during the reign of King Suriyavarman II (1113-1150) of Angkor. Wat Phra Pai Luang was originally a Hindu sanctuary.
converted into a Mahayana Buddhist monastery in the 13th century. This is evident from three Khmer-style towers called prang. Also, the lower part of a stone Buddha image in the meditation posture is similar to those built by order of King Jayavarman VII [1181-1220]. Another example is Wat Si Sawai, which reflects traces of Khmer architecture of an older Hindu shrine, dating from the 12th to 14th centuries, i.e. predating the Thai takeover of the city, and given such artifacts as Shiva images, a reclining Vishnu lintel and several small shiva lingas.

The historical site of Si Satchanalai shows traces of a sanctuary established by Mon and modified by Khmer in the 12th century. They include Phra That Mu Tao, a Mon-style chedi, and Khmer-style artefacts such as fragmented eaves with images of deities and stucco images of Phra Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara. The vihara of Wat Phra Si Rattana Maha That was built on top of an ancient brick structure.

Excavations by a team of Thai and Australian researchers yielded evidence of the existence of an indigenous ceramic industry predating the establishment of Sukhothai and Si Satchanalai. Finds include terra-cotta tiles, balustrades, pediment decorations, dishes, and bottles fired with the bluish-green glazes that characterize Sangkhalok ceramic ware.

Near the site of the historic city of Kamphaeng Phet, where tributaries of the Ping River flow from mountains to the west and from hills to the east, four ancient settlements were uncovered. West of the Ping River are three sites, Trai Trung, Nakhon Chum and Sa Mon. At Trai Trung, a stone inscription refers to its foundation by King Chaisiri of Chiang Saen in the year 957 A.D. There, remnants of several structures in disrepair, mainly ruins of chedi and ramparts, held such items as small beads, Roman lamps and blue pottery of Sukhothai Province.
ceramic fragments. Nakhon Chum has remains of brick structures of comparatively smaller size than at the other sites. In its centre lies Wat Phra Borommathat with a Burmese-style chedi, built in recent history. Sa Mon is the site of a palace girded by a square earthen wall, with moats on three sides, a pond in the middle, yet no standing structures remaining. East of the Ping River is the ancient site of Chakangrao. Inside its up to three-metre high earthen wall are edifices such as Kamphaeng Pom Thung Sethi, a fortification of 83 metres in length and six metres in height built from laterite, where famous votive tablets were found.

**CONSOLIDATION OF THAI POLITY AND CULTURE**

**THE ROYAL CITY OF SUKHOTHAI AND ITS ENVIRONS**

As the terrain was conducive to further expansion, larger realms were formed by ethnic Thai population groups and more powerful centres established by Thai rulers, in comparison to the older yet smaller centres in upstream valley sections, there under spatial constraints.

River basins, with fertile plains and communication as well as transportation arteries, and their hinterland, rich in natural resources such as water of tributaries, forests abundant with timber, lumber, firewood and non-timber products, and wildlife, were covered with settlements. The creation of a largely hydraulic infrastructure facilitated the building of productive communities and improvements of communication and transportation.

Nodes of social cohesion, economic strength and political might underpinned the formation of power centres, among them the emergence of the regional lead-power centred in the ancient city of Sukhothai. At times in competition with such places as Kamphaeng Phet and Phitsanulok, these three power centres known as the “royal cities”, drew on resources available and surplus generated in the neighbouring areas around the towns of Phichai, now called Uttaradit, Phichit and Phetchabun. The grandeur of Sukhothai City was enhanced by the splendour of the town of Si Satchanalai, at close distance.

As evident from the physical geography, the mid-section of the
Yom River with its tributaries provided a unique natural environment for human habitat. The sheer number of tributaries, named Pha Wiang, Mae San, Mae Sung, Tha Phae and Fa Kradan, particularly the Fa Kradan river basin with its own, four major tributaries called Mae Thulao, Dayang, Saket and Kaphung, and the marsh known as Nong Khlong Nam Tan secured a steady supply of water. With the essential components of site selection in place, namely, forests on nearby mountains as well as hills and water running from headwater areas therein, two of the indispensable requirements for the establishment of a power centre were met. They were also essential for the building of a sanctuary with monastery, temple, shrine and pagoda in the centre of a fortified city, girded by walls and moats. The surrounding plain was transformed into cropping land, mainly paddy fields in which to produce rice, the staple crop, and straw to feed the draught animals, typically buffaloes.
In such setting, the city of Sukhothai flourished. The large number of some 40 sanctuaries in an area of about 70 sq km is testimony to the concentration of power and the population density in historical time. Evidence of its pre-eminence is manifold. In Wat Mahathat, its principle temple with its main chedi built in a style known as Phum Kao Bin, four prang at the cardinal points and the ruin of its eleven-bay vihara, a seated bronze Buddha image, Phra Si Sakayamuni, cast in 1362, was situated. Of the palatial, royal buildings on elevated terrain, Noen Prasat, only brick foundations remain as well as remnants of the scripture hall from one of two ponds. Wat Si Chum houses the giant Buddha image named Phra Atchana and features 50 engraved slate slabs on the ceiling of the access passageway depicting episodes in the Lord Buddha’s incarnations. Wat Chang Lom with its Sri Lankan-style, bell-shaped chedi adorned by 36 stucco elephants is believed to have been built by King Ramkamhaeng the Great [1278—1317]. On an island in the middle of a large pond rises the Sri Lankan-style, bell-shaped main chedi of Wat Sa Si with its vihara and other structures built in a blend of Sivichayan and Sri Lankan styles. This ensemble creates the impression...
of elegant simplicity. Wat Traphang Ngoen with its ubosot in an artificial rectangular lake and its chedi of superb elegance is the venue of the annual Loy Krathong festival. Wat Chedi Sung, deemed the finest chedi of the Sukhothai Period, impresses through its bell-shaped superstructure and stepped platform that cap a massive base, an ensemble of Sivichayan and Sri Lankan architectural features. The stucco walking Buddha image of Wat Chetuphon, one of originally four that is preserved together with a standing image, is considered a masterpiece of Sukhothai sculptural art. Near the main structure is a small sanctuary with a Buddha image known locally as Phra Si Ariya, Lord Buddha the Saviour, the Future Buddha. The southern panel of stucco decorations at Wat Traphang Thong Lang shows the descent of Lord Buddha to earth, exuding solemnity for which it is valued as one of the masterpieces of Sukhothai art.

Attractive temple complexes representing the Sukhothai style include Wat Traphang Thong with its lotus pond; Wat Takuan with its restored Sri Lankan-style, bell-shaped chedi; Wat Chana Songkhram with its squat Sri Lankan-style chedi; Wat Sorasak with its square base adorned with 24 restored stucco elephant buttresses; Wat Saphan Hin, once the seat of the Buddhist patriarch; and Wat Traphang Thong where a Footprint of Lord Buddha is enshrined. Among edifices of Khmer origin that were transformed into Buddhist sanctuaries are Wat Phra Phai Luang, Wat Si Sawai and Wat Chom Chuen.

The historical monument of Chedi Ngam also serves as a landmark of the worldly necessity to ensure water supply. Nearby lies an ancient reservoir in which water from mountain streams has been stored to supply the capital of the Sukhothai Kingdom. To this day, that reservoir supplies the modern city of Sukhothai with mountain spring water.

Light and sound performance during Loy Krathong festival in Sukhothai Historical Park
At medium distance to the north from Sukhothai, on the banks of the Yom River near the confluence with its tributary Mae Sung, lies the ancient town of Si Satchanalai. The so-called “royal road”, known as Thanon Phra Ruang, linked the cities of Sukhothai and Si Satchanalai. It was the most important satellite city of the Sukhothai Kingdom. Some historians consider its ancient site as the apogee of Thai city planning. It was an important commercial centre owing to its highly esteemed ceramics that were exported to realms throughout Southeast Asia and to China.

To some experts, the ruins of Si Satchanalai appear to be more interesting than those of Sukhothai. At the heart of the ancient site, once girded by a wall and moats, is the huge Sri Lankan-style, bell-shaped chedi with stucco elephant buttresses around its base that forms the centrepiece of Wat Chang Lom. It is thought to be the first Sri Lankan-style chedi of the Sukhothai Kingdom, built in the reign of King Ramkamhaeng the Great (1278-1317). The 33 minor chedi and mondop of various styles, namely, Sri Lankan, Sivichayan, Sukhothai and Burmese, containing relics of royalty and surrounding the main, lotus-bud chedi and, behind it, a derelict vihara built in unique Sukhothai style, make Wat Chedi Thaeo one of the most beautiful ensembles. Wat Nang Phaya encompasses an attractively decorated vihara. On a low and wooded hill north of Wat Chang Lom stands Wat Khao Phnom Phloeng; among its ruins is a seated Buddha together with a chedi and few columns. On another, nearby hill top is what remains of Wat Suwan Khiri, a single chedi. Its site offers a panoramic view of the ancient site below.

Nearby, visible from Si Satchanalai on the banks of the Yom River, is the ancient site of Chaliang. Though originally a Khmer staging post, its most important structure
and principal monastery is Wat Phra Si Rattana Maha That. Its statue of the walking Buddha in the Sukhothai style is considered a masterpiece. The temple’s structure underwent many transformations in architectural style, ultimately resulting in the present-day, Ayutthaya-style main prang that is believed to have been built over a Khmer-style tower. It is deemed one of the finest structures of its type in Thailand.

The Si Satchanalai - Chalieng Historical Park forms, together with the magnificent, much larger ancient site of Sukhothai, the Sukhothai National Historical Park, and along with Kamphaeng Phet Historical Park a UNESCO World Heritage Site, established in December, 1991.

The plain along the Yom River is dotted with ancient pottery kilns, especially in the areas of Ban Ko Noi and Ban Pa Yang where some of the finest Sangkhalok ceramics were produced. To date, more than 500 kilns were uncovered. At Ban Ko Noi, 19 kilns found lying on top of each other enable archaeologists to trace the development and refinement of pottery over an extended period. Finds in abundance include exquisite glazed ceramics, stoneware, celadon, decorated vases, household utensils, human and animal figurines, and ornamental pieces for temples and palaces as well. Those potters produced some of the world’s finest in the 14th to 15th centuries. Examples are ceramics produced at 49 Thuriang kilns which feature on their bottom three different monogrammes, or trademarks rather, either a disc, or a fish, or else a blossom. Recent research findings rendered evidence that the technology had been developed by Thai potters themselves.
Another royal route, much longer than the one linking Sukhothai with Si Satchanalai, connected Sukhothai with the another “royal city”, Kamphaeng Phet, located in the southwest. It ran parallel with another, equally important, perhaps even vital infrastructure facility built and operated to supply Sukhothai with water that was diverted from the Ping River. This double-purpose connection, also known as Thanon Phra Ruang, was a unique accomplishment in that the aqueduct, known as Tho Pu Phraya was designed and constructed as a conduit which kept water flowing by natural gravity. Considering the sheer distance and the difficult terrain, bypassing the valley of the Ping tributary called Wang Chaliang, cutting across the watershed and bypassing, again, the valley of the Yom tributary called Sarabop, this aqueduct constituted a major technical achievement in the development and application of advanced hydraulics. In the year 1981, H.M. King Bhumibol Adulyadej initiated the Khlong Tho Thongdaeng irrigation project, thus reviving the same technical approach and
following the same route. A piece of an old log found along the track might have been part of the ancient aqueduct.

Situated at the southwestern end of this route-cum-aqueduct, Than Phra Ruang and Tho Pu Phraya, was the ancient royal city of Kamphaeng Phet. Its surrounding plain received water not only from the Ping River but also from its tributaries such as Kachaeng and Mae Raka, of which the latter formed a large river basin with four major streams. Thai people settling there first, in the 11th century, were refugees from Fang, who were subjugated when an outpost of the Khmer Empire was established, early in the 13th century.

Within the boundaries of the Kamphaeng Phet Historical Park, two areas are distinguished, the one within the old city walls and the one beyond. Remains of structures in the city, a garrison town established 1347 by King Li Thai and a satellite of Sukhothai, include Wat Phra Kaeo, the largest complex with ruins of several vihara, a bot, and a chedi; Wat Phra That with a fine, octagonal-base chedi of the late Sukhothai Period; ancient moats and crenellated walls forming a trapezoidal shape with forts; and San Phra Isuan, built in the 10th century to install a bronze image of Shiva. Attached to its base is Inscription #13 which relates the restoration of temples, aqueducts, roads and irrigation canals, and invokes blessings to secure water supply.

Located outside the city walls, to the north, are ancient buildings known as the Aranyik Ruins of forest monasteries built during the 14th to 16th centuries. Wat Phra Non had housed a large reclining Buddha statue; only some laterite columns of its vihara remain. At Wat Phra Si Iriyabot, of four Buddha images in the attitudes of standing, walking, seated and reclining, only a standing Buddha, considered one of the masterpieces of Sukhothai Art, remains in good condition. In the ruined ubosot of Wat Sing is the laterite core of a Buddha image. Wat Chang Rop has remains of a very large, square-based chedi, once flanked by the forequarters of 68 elephants sculpted from laterite whose appearance attests to excellent Sukhothai-style craftsmanship and represents one of the finest monuments in the region.
Wat Chang Lom, Kamphaeng Phet Province

The large complex of Wat Phra Kaeo, Kamphaeng Phet Province
CONSOLIDATION OF THAI POLITY AND CULTURE
THE ROYAL CITY OF PHITSANULOK AND ITS ENVIRONS

To the east of Sukhothai, the point in the mid-section of the Nan River, from which the river was navigable in downstream direction, is the site of ancient settlements. The narrow plain wedged between mountains and the main river was well supplied with water by the tributaries of the Nan River, particularly Pat and Tron as well as the lakes named Mai, So, Lom and Boek.

Given this physical endowment, several ancient settlements existed there. The oldest is thought to be the one at a site named Ban Bueng Wang Ngiu where finds such as human bones, ancient tools, pottery fragments, coloured paintings and bronze tools were uncovered. The site of the original town of Uttaradit was called Bang Pho Tha It, on the right bank of the Nan River. Another site is that of Wiang Chao Ngo, believed to have been built at the turn of the 12th to 13th centuries, serving as an outpost of the Sukhothai Kingdom. Its city lay-out is rectangular in shape, with remnants of moats and earthen ramparts. Of the same period are the towns known as Tha Chu Chok and Sawangkhaburi. During the Ayutthaya period, 16 more towns were set up, one of which is Pichai, where Phraya Tak Sin, then Governor of Kamphaeng Phet, had his troops rest and muster before attacking Lan Na. Mueang Phichai, south of modern Uttaradit Town, developed into the old centre around the northernmost river port. Between Wat Phra Borom That and Wat Phra Thuen Sila At lie walls and moats, the remnants of Pichai or Old Uttaradit. The name “Uttaradit” was bestowed by King Rama IV [1851-1868] upon Pichai, in 1852, meaning the “northern port”.

With the Nan River not being navigable further upstream, the said settlements had grown into important entrepôts between trade areas. Numerous sanctuaries render evidence of their significance especially for the Thai kingdoms in the downstream regions. Wat Phra Borommathat Thung Yang, also known as Wat Maha That, has a large, circular, Sri Lankan-style chedi housing a relic. Standing and seated Buddha images of the
Sukhothai period, among them the most venerated Phra Si An Tat, are preserved in the vihara of Wat Phra Thaen Sila At. Two seated Buddha statues of the Sukhothai Period in Wat Phra Yuen Phra Bat Yukhon are made from an alloy of gold, silver and bronze. Wat Phra Fang, built in the Sukhothai Period, has a beautiful chedi and a small ubosot restored in the Ayutthaya period. Door panels moved from Wat Phra Fang to Wat Thamma Thipatai were crafted in the graceful, late Ayutthaya style, and are rated second only to those of Wat Suthat in Bangkok. Wat Phra Borommathat has a chedi built in the
Sukhothai period, and a beautiful vihara built in the Lan Chang style, which was restored in the 18th century. Situated near Wat Tha Thanon is a small Chinese shrine with a beautiful, highly venerated seated Buddha image sculpted in the Chiang Saen Style.

Given the physical setting of a plain crossed by the Nan River and its tributaries called Khwae Noi, Hang Ka and Wang Thong, which by themselves form large river basins, and with the Yom River running almost in parallel to the west, environmental conditions have been outright conducive for the establishment of productive communities. Moreover, this plain is dotted with wetlands. The major ones are named Kam Lai, Pla Nao, Baen, Thale Kaeo and Taling Chan. The obvious challenge has been to avail of this potential by making ample use of the know-how of applied hydraulics. One historically ubiquitous feature, which has been preserved over the centuries and appears to be unique, is the waterborne habitat of floating houses, a landmark of Phitsanulok, at present.

Legend has it that the site of present-day Phitsanulok already had existed during the lifetime of Lord Budhha, who had accepted alms and partaken of his meal under a tree at the Samor Krang Mountain. Hence, that settlement is believed to be much more ancient than others in the region. One of the oldest towns in this area, originally a Khmer outpost, was called Sa Luang Song Khwae. As part of the Sukhothai Kingdom, it was a military bastion whose ruins are situated near the wetland of Thale Kaeo. Another old settlement by the name of Ban Wang San existed during the Sukhothai and Ayutthaya periods, as evident from the remains of monasteries such as Wat Luang and Wat Wang San, especially their Buddha images and ceramics, and Wat Bang Saphan with its inscription known as Suphamit Chadok, “words of religious wisdom”.

Wat Phra Sri Rattana Maha That Wora Maha Wihan, locally known as Wat Yai, the most eminent monastery, is believed to have been constructed on the order of Si Tham Traipidok, King of Chiang Saen, after having defeated the realm of Si Satchanalai, to enshrine three Buddha images known as Phra Buddha Chinarat, Phra Buddha Chinasi and Phra Sri Sasada, all of the subduing Mara posture. The most
serene and graceful is the *Phra Buddha Chinarat*, a Sukhothai-style image cast of bronze and gilded, created around 1250. Likely from the same time dates the image of *Phra Attharot*, a standing Buddha statue housed in a Sukhothai-style chapel that is based on a more ancient foundation.

The *vihara* housing the *Phra Buddha Chinarat* statue had originally been built in the Sukhothai style. It was repeatedly renovated, probably even rebuilt, in 1482, by King Borom Trailokanat [1448-1488], who had governed Phitsanulok for 25 years before ascending the throne. This chapel was renovated, once again, during the reign of King Boromakot (1733-1758). Its interior as of today is a symphony of shape, colour and proportion, befitting the image of *Phra Buddha Chinarat*, the eminent example of Sukhothai Art. In the middle of the doors of the *vihara* there is a mullion which is regarded as a sacred item protecting people from dangers.
The **chedi** of Wat Yai was originally a Sukhothai-style, lotus-shaped pagoda with a Buddha relic enshrined. On the order of King Borom Trailokanat (1448-1488), who resided in Phitsanulok during 1463 through 1483 to wage military campaigns against the Lan Na Kingdom in the north, the original structure was built over to create the principal **prang** in the Ayutthaya style, as it is seen today. An ancient site called **Wang Chan Kasem** served as residence of Thai rulers, including King Ramkamhaeng the Great [1278-1317], King Boromratchadhirat I [1370-1388], King Boromratchadhirat II [1424-1448], King Boromratchadhirat III [1448-1488], King Boromratchadhirat IV [1529-1533] and King Naresuan [1590-1605], whose birthplace it is. In commemoration, the King Naresuan the Great Shrine was built. At another ancient site of a former town, King Borom Trailokanat had Wat Chula Mani built, where the King entered the monkhood in 1465. A small stupa in the precinct of this monastery is originally of the Mon style adorned with an intricate design featuring swans. The apsis of the **vihara** is decorated with delicate stucco figurines of running geese and blossoms.

Other historical monasteries include Wat Chedi Yot Thong with its Sukhothai-style, lotus-bud shaped **chedi**, the sole such structure preserved in Phitsanulok Province; Wat Aranyik surrounded by moats dating from the Sukhothai period; and Wat Ratburana, built by King Borom Trailokanat [1448-1488], with its graceful, three-headed **Naga**.
Amidst a real maze of numerous streams and wetlands, forming a broad plain crossed by the Nan and Yom Rivers further downstream, the town of Phichit is situated, in the province of the same name. To its east, the Nan River tributaries of Wang Thong, Sak Lek and Khlong Dan form wide river basins. A large wetland named Bueng Mong is located to the northeast of Phichit Town. Mueang Sa Luang, also known as Kao Phichit, was founded more than 900 years ago. Besides walls and moats, its remaining ancient structures, built either during the Sukhothai or Ayutthaya period, include the monastery of Wat Phra Sri Rattana Maha That with its large, bell-shaped Phra That Chedi, a repository of hundreds of votive tablets. A Khmer inscription, excavated at this chedi, describes the ancient town with the word “sunthorn” meaning beautiful, a synonym for “phichit”.

The “Old City Park”, Mueang Kao, has several attractions. There is the city wall of the historical town. At Wat Phra Si Rattana Maha That, a deserted monastery with traces of a huge wall and a ruined Sri Lankan-style pagoda, excavations of a...
mound yielded stone slabs inscribed in Khmer. A Sukhothai-style, plaster-coated brick ubosot remains of the deserted Wat Nakphon Chum, built about 800 years ago. A high mound surrounded by a moat, situated outside the city wall, is known as Ko Si Mala. On another mound, a pagoda with four entrances called chaturamuk mondop houses the city pillar and a sculpture of the city founder.

Wat Nakphon Chum, built in the Sukhothai Period, has an ubosot with narrow openings for ventilation in its walls instead of windows and a large Sukhothai-style Buddha statue. Situated on top of a hill which looks like an elephant due to the formation of the white stone, Wat Kao Rup Chang has a Sri Lankan-style pagoda and the story of Trai Bhum Phra Ruang depicted in its murals. Wat Rong Chang, formerly called Wat Khlong, dates back to the Ayutthaya Period. It has three big Buddha images outdoors, one reclining, one in subduing Mara posture and one in the posture of appeasing relatives. The centre of attraction is a large pagoda containing inscriptions of Lord Buddha’s 84,000 sermons, Phra Traipitaka. Wat Pho Prathap Chang was built by Ayutthaya’s King Phra Chao Suea [1703-1709] at his birthplace. The site of its ruined, huge vihara is surrounded by double walls. The modern city of Phichit

Wat Nakphon Chum in Phichit Province
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dates from its relocation to the west bank of the Nan River in 1845. There, the monastery named Wat Tha Luang houses a Chiang Saen-style bronze Buddha statue.

At the lower reach of the upstream section of the Pa Sak River, the town of Phetchabun is located in an elongated plain receiving water from the river basins of the numerous Pa Sak tributaries, among them the major ones named Saduang Yai, Nam Phung, Chang Talut, Lao and Pa Daeng.

Excavations at the archaeological site of Non Tum yielded stone bangles, stone axes, stone-drilling tools and earthenware. Wat Maha That traces the history of the reign of Phra Chao Phetchabun and is, therefore, thought to be as old as the city itself. It has a Sukhothai-style stupa with a lotus-bud-shaped spire.

A festival known as Um Phra Dam Nam commemorates the legendary supernatural power of the Phra Buddha Maha Thammaracha image. This had been found by fishermen in the Pa Sak River and placed at Wat Traiphum. From there, it mysteriously disappeared, only to be recovered from the bottom of the Pa Sak River at the same spot where it had been salvaged, in the first place. Annually, the image is submerged in the river by the governor of Phetchabun Province, believing that this rite will ensure fine weather conducive to the growth of field crops.

The Buddha images in Wat Nakhon Chum
The physical map of the northern area of Thailand’s Central Plain shows a maze of watercourses, consisting of seemingly countless creeks, rivulets, streams and rivers. Moreover, the plain is dotted with numerous marshes, swamps, ponds and lakes. An overlay of human-engineered canals crisscrossing the area reflects how this vital natural endowment was optimized, by creating a network geared to supply water, facilitate irrigation and drainage, regulate inundation, and control flooding.

In the northern surroundings the Wang River empties into the Ping River, and the Yom River empties into the Nan River, and ultimately the greenish water of the Ping River converges with the reddish water of the Nan River. At this confluence, near the western rim of the huge wetland named Bueng Boraphet in Nakhon Sawan Province, Thailand’s main stream, the Chao Phraya River, is formed to run its entire course southward within the country.

The upper great plain straddling basins of the major rivers, known in Thai as Mae Nam, the principal water-ways, include the Chao Phraya River, with the Lop Buri and Pa Sak rivers to the east, and to the west the Sakae Krang as well as...
the Noi rivers and the long river which is variably known as Khlong Makham in its upstream section, as Suphan Buri River in its upper-middle section, as Nakhon Chaisi River in its lower-middle section, and as Tha Chin River in its downstream section and estuary.

This wide plain of rivers flowing in parallel forms the historically oldest “rice bowl” of Siam, also the largest, contiguous one in Thailand. It is the cradle of the ‘hydraulic society’ with it riparian way of life, perfectly attuned to seasonal changes. Availing of inundation by rainfall and its run-off carried by tributaries as the source of water for extensive wet rice growing, early settlements were founded on slightly elevated, firm and dry ground as well as on hillocks in the plain and in foothills of mountains. It is in such environment where the so-called ‘floating rice’ used to be cultivated, with stalks of up to five metres in length, particularly in low-lying parts of the present-day provinces of Uthai Thani, Chainat, Sing Buri, Suphan Buri and Ang Thong. To this day, a characteristic feature of the upstream river basins in the central plain are the hillocks, hills and mountains crowned with monasteries. Examples of perfectly adapted two-level settlements have remained visible in places like the market of Ban Li of Song Phi Nong District in Suphan Buri Province.

This abundant source of water has given rise to successive civilizations, in the course of being contested by regional powers. Its early history is evident from the sites with prehistoric remnants, monuments of the Dvaravati Period, ruined outposts marking the historical expansion of the ancient Khmer empire with its characteristic grid of regional nodes, and the heritage rich in traits and treasures of Thai culture.
Prehistory and Early History

Following the north-south direction of the major rivers, archaeological evidence of prehistoric and early historical settlements covers the area between sites at the northernmost latitude, in Uthai Thani Province, and the southernmost latitude, in Suphan Buri Province.

The hill named Khao Pla Ra, situated in Uthai Thani Province, is the site with 40 three-thousand-year old cliff paintings that depict human and animal figures ostensibly engaged in agriculture and hunting. Objects found there include stone axes and three-legged pots. At short distance, downstream the Chao Phraya River in Nakhon Sawan Province, is Mueang Chansen, an ancient city of the Dvaravati period, where many prehistoric relics were found made of baked soil, stone, or bronze. The Wat Chansen Museum has an extensive collection of local antiquities that attest to prehistoric iron smelting and bronze casting such as earrings, spear tips, iron tools, bronze idols, and polished stone axes.

In contemporary Lop Buri Province, two sites render archaeological evidence of Neolithic settlements. Mueang Sap Champa, built at an elevated site on the edge of the Central Plain, shows the remains of a rather scattered, rectangular settlement surrounded by two-metre high earthen walls measuring 834 x 704 metres, with a ten-metre high inner wall. Bangles made from stone and marlite, and earthenware fragments suggest that this site was inhabited some 2,500 to 3,000 years ago.

Clustered in the area of present-day Ban Khu Mueang in Ang Thong Province are numerous sites, altogether...
41 as of recent archaeological evidence, that dot the prehistoric delta of the Chao Phraya River. Remains of another such ancient coastal town in the province’s Mueang District are shaped like a square with rounded corners, measuring 400 metres in length and surrounded by a moat. Inside, earthenware fragments were found.

At high altitude toward the east, in mountainsides of Saraburi Province, caves held objects dating from the Stone Ages. In the cave named Phra Phothisat, also known as Phra Ngam or Khao Nam Phu, ancient tools found are dated as of the Middle Stone Age and, hence, 8,350 – 11,000 years old. Excavations in the cave named Thep Nimit Thara Thong Daeng yielded bits of pottery, traces of ashes, and ornaments made of a kind of shell, all of which are dated as of the late New Stone Age, between 5,400 and 6,400 years ago. At a site known as Ban Di Lang, excavations yielded stone tools.

Of complex prehistoric and historical significance is the area of the contemporary town of U Thong in Suphan Buri Province. Its site had been inhabited since Neolithic times. In early history, during the heydays of the Funan and Sivichaya empires, there was a town on the high plain above the banks of the Suphan Buri River. Its remains are oval in shape, surrounded by a moat, with the longest extensions measuring 700 and 1,700 metres. Roman lamps, silver coins and earrings as well as beads and terra-cotta busts found at the site date from the Funan Period (3rd to 6th centuries). Bronze figures refer to the Sivichaya Period (3rd to 13th centuries).

Several prehistoric sites had seemingly been well chosen by their earliest settlers. This assumption is supported by their successive occupation throughout history. Prehistoric finds are, in some instances, by-products of archaeological research at sites that strike the eye as ancient settlements dating from the Dvaravati Period.

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1 All historical data, i.e. years and centuries, refer to the chronology of the Western Calendar.
MONUMENTS AND ARTEFACTS TRACED TO THE 6TH UNTIL 12TH CENTURIES
EXAMPLES OF THE DVARAVATI CULTURE

The ancient town of Bueng Khok in Uthai Thani Province shows the Dvaravati style in the layout of its four city gates, four ponds and moat. Items found include stone axes, bricks, fragments of pots and jars, knife blades and spearheads made from iron, ornaments, and three inscriptions, one in Sanskrit and two in Mon language.

In present-day Manorom District of Chai Nat Province are three sites that date from the Dvaravati Period. They are known as the ancient cities of Nakhon Noi, Nang Lek, and Mueang U Taphao. The latter site, bearing a frequently occurring topographical designation referring to a water-way suitable for vessels to anchor, is situated upon the U Taphao River. There, the remains within a trapezoid precinct include a stone-sculpted Dhamma Wheel inscribed with a Pali text in Pallawa characters, a green stone pillar characteristic of the Dvaravati Period, the base of a stupa, and human skeletons. Unique are the remains of two ponds complete with a water-work system.

Magnificent are the monuments dating back to the Dvaravati Period that have been preserved in the town of Sankhaburi, as it is known by now, in Chai Nat Province. Historically an important regional centre by the name of Phraek Si Racha, also known as Mueang Phraek and shortened to Phraek, renamed Sankhaburi, also known as Mueang San or Sanburi, the town was most likely founded during the Dvaravati Period. Traces of the ancient town are found in the compounds of the monasteries named Wat Phra Mahathat, also known as Wat Hua Mueang, and Wat Phra Kaeo. The latter is adorned with a beautiful
Dvaravati-style stupa praised as “The Queen Stupa of Southeast Asia”.

At short distance toward the east, the ancient site called Mueang Chansen dates from the Dvaravati Period. Its square area with four rounded corners, enclosed with trenches, to this day situated on higher ground, covers 48 hectares. Relics found there are on display at the Wat Chansen Museum. They include ceramic ware, earthenware votive tablets, seals, dolls, stone-sculpted Dhamma Wheels, and bases of Buddha statues. Another relic of the Dvaravati Period, the Inscription Dong Mae Nang Mueang, engraved on a green slate, more than 1,000 years ago, relates the history of a town named Thanya Buri.

Farther to the east, Lawo was located, the capital of a Dvaravati Kingdom ruled by a Mon dynasty, beginning some 1,400 years ago until into the 11th century. It is the site of the present-day town of Lop Buri. Inscription # 18 dating from the 7th century at the San Phra Kan shrine in ancient Mon characters relates four religious themes. Another remain is the Dvaravati-style pagoda, called chedi in Thai, in the compound of Wat Nakhon Kosa, a monastery that was built in an ancient site.

In Lop Buri Province, an ancient site built first about 3,000 years ago, known as Mueang Sap Champa, prospered until the end of the 9th century. Apart from remains of three ruined halls and a pond inside the enclosure with a ten-metre high inner wall, artefacts from the Dvaravati Period were found such as Buddha images, dolls, bronze jewellery, household utensils, and five inscriptions in the Pali and Sanskrit languages.

In the Mueang District of Ang Thong Province, at one of 41 ancient sites in the prehistoric delta of the Chao Phraya River discovered to date, earthenware fragments, Buddha images, mortars, and gongs were found that are ascribed to the Dvaravati Period. Similar evidence
is reported from a site called U Taphao in Saraburi Province.

There, excavations yielded pottery, human bones, axes, and bead ornaments. Indications are that this was a trading post during the Dvaravati Period, where boats delivered goods. In the mountains of Saraburi Province, the cave called Khao Wong, also known as Narai Cave, has an inscription in Pallawa characters which relates, in the ancient Mon language, a text of the Dvaravati Period dated as of the 12th century. Of the same period are paintings in low relief depicting the life story of Lord Buddha that were detected in the cave named Phra Phothisat, also known as Phra Ngam or Khao Nam Phu.

One of the greatest cities of the Dvaravati Period was located near the present-day town of U Thong in Suphan Buri Province. It is known for its many ruins of stupas and objects such as Buddha images of different periods and the Wheel of Dhamma sculpted from green stone. Some of the finds are preserved at the U Thong National Museum, while others are displayed at the National Museum Bangkok.

Monuments and Artefacts Traced to the 10th Until 13th Centuries Examples of the Khmer Style

Remains of original Khmer-style edifices exist in fewer places than do traces of the preceding Dvaravati Period. Wat Phra Borommathat Wihan in Sankhaburi Town rests on the foundation of a Khmer sanctuary built from laterite. There, an inscription written in Khmer characters refers to the city of Phraek Si Racha, the ancient name of present-day Sankha Buri in Chai Nat Province. In the precinct of nearby Wat Phra Kaeo, an image of Indra riding the elephant named Erawan is what remains of Khmer or Khom artefacts of more than 1,000 years ago, most of which were plundered. Only the said image remained in situ, as well as a delicately carved lintel found recently inside of the back of
a seated Buddha image in front of a chedi, built blending traits of the late Dvaravati Period with early Khmer Style, are preserved. At Wat Song Phi Nong, the ruins of a sanctuary are dated as of the 8th century, and the ensemble of standing Buddha statues on three sides of a tower, prang, are examples of the Khmer style, which is characteristic of the ancient town of Lawo.

Further downstream the Chao Phraya River, in Sing Buri Province, the monastery named Wat Na Phra That, also known as Wat Hua Mueang, has an ancient brick tower or prang which features klip khanun, decorative pieces likened to the cloves [klip in Thai] of jackfruit [khanun], placed at the corners above the fronton of the tower and at each of its reduced storeys rising towards the tapering cornice, and houses a Buddha statue in seated posture. Built during the Khmer Period, it is almost completely preserved, in contrast to remnants of several Buddha stone statues in a nearby vihara.

One of the important towns of the far-fledged Khmer Empire during the 10th to 13th centuries was Lawo. This capital city of the ancient Dvaravati Realm was conquered by the Khmer during the reign of King Suryavarman I (1007-1050). It remained one of the Khmer outposts until the rise of the Thai Kingdom of Sukhothai in the late 13th century.

Khmer architectural and artistic patterns fused with traditional Mon styles resulted in a distinctive style that is known as the famous Lop Buri style, so named after the town at the site of ancient Lawo. One of the oldest and most historic sites in Thailand, many of its major monuments are situated in the old town. Considered the oldest monument of Lop Buri, the pagoda or prang of the small Hindu shrine named Thewa Sathan Prang Khaek, or Prang Khaek for short, with its tapering portal arch was built in the Khmer style of the Preah Ko Style (late 9th century to mid-10th century).

As the ruins show, it consisted of three adjoining towers or prang.

A former Brahman shrine named San Phra Kan, a small edifice built from sandstone featuring a doorway graced with images of the Hindu deity Vishnu and serpents, naga, is situated adjacent to an ancient
Khmer style pagoda or prang dating from the 10th century. Throughout history, structures had been built one upon another. Hence, it is locally known as San Sung, the tall shrine. In the past there was, at the ground level, an image of the deity Narai Banthomsin, dated as of the 11th century, with a small vihara at the upper level. All these structures represent a blend with a Mon-style octagonal stone structure. Inside the vihara are two standing stone sculptures of the Hindu deity Narai, sculpted in the Lop Buri style, whose head got lost.

Wat Phra Si Rattana Maha That is one of best examples of Khmer regional art in the Lop Buri style. Its magnificent and imposing tower or prang, the tallest in Lop Buri, was built in that style, with Mahayana Buddhist features, on the ruins of an earlier temple, likely in 1157. Phra Prang Sam Yot, the “Sanctuary of the Three Towers”, is a well-preserved example of Khmer architecture in the transition period from the Angkor Wat to the Bayon styles. It was built from laterite during the 12th and 13th centuries. The floor plan of the sanctuary resembles a Greek cross with a central corridor linking the three laterite towers, with corbelled roof porticos on four sides. Originally dedicated to the Hindu Trinity of Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, and Shiva the Destroyer in the Khom Period, it became a Mahayana Buddhist temple.

The monastery named Wat Nakhon Kosa has a Lop Buri style tower or prang and a Buddha statue dating from the period of Khmer rule. Four
Buddha images, some sculpted from sandstone, others from quartz, suggest that the forest monastery named Wat Yang Na Rangsi, in the past known as Wat Phanya Yang or Wat Yang Si Suthammaram, located by the Lop Buri River, had originally been built during the same period.

In the southeast of the upstream river basins, in the Ban Mo District of Saraburi Province, remnants at the site of an ancient town called Paruntapa Ratcha Thani are of the same Khmer style like the Phra Prang Sam Yot in Lop Buri Town, particularly statuettes of Phra Phothisat and of deities protecting doorways. Moreover, that ancient town bordered a plain that had been irrigated through the Anusasananant Canals, supplying a rectangular area that is 360 metres wide and 2,000 metres long.

CRADLE OF SIAM’S
‘HYDRAULIC SOCIETY’ WITH ITS RIPARIAN WAY OF LIFE

Acculturation of older, cultural residues and assimilation of groups of people of related as well as different ethnic origins by the emerging, power wielding Thai created a region that made neighbouring powers envious. In making use of the ancient structural substance from the Dvaravati and Khmer periods, through the restoration of ancient buildings and the straightforward transforming of Hindu sanctuaries to Buddhist temples, and ultimately the revival of the Khmer architectural style in the Ayutthaya Period, as manifest in numerous towers, called pagodas or prang, the role of Thai Kingdoms as leading powers in Mainland Southeast Asia was visualized. Though devastated, time and again, at times of warfare, fine examples of the culture germane to this ‘rice bowl’ have survived.

Keeping in mind that the upstream river basins of the central plain are adjacent to the historic Sukhothai Kingdom, their exposure to Thai culture and Thai way of life materialized first in this area of immediate and lasting contacts.

From the Sukhothai Period date two monasteries in Nakhon Sawan Province, Wat Woranart Banphot, also known as Wat Khao Kop, and Wat Chom Khiri Nak Phrot, both situated on hills. The former is known for its pagoda, called chedi in Thai,
and vihara housing Buddha’s footprint. The latter houses a fine Ayutthaya-style Buddha. Its ubosot is surrounded by two circles of sandstone stelae known as bai sema in Thai. Another monastery, Wat Kriangkrai Klang, has a late-Ayutthaya-style chedi, a ruined mondop housing Buddha’s footprint, and attractive mural paintings.

To the west of and at safe distance from the Chao Phraya River, in present-day Nong Chang District of Uthai Thani Province, is the site of the old town of Uthai Thani, an important centre of both the Sukhothai and Ayutthaya kingdoms. This is evident from such remains as the monasteries named Wat Hua Mak, Wat Yang and Wat Kuti. Solely Wat Chaeng is still in good repair, with its Khmer-style tower or prang built in 1538. Late in the Ayutthaya period, Wat Thammakhosok was built, also known as Wat Rong Kho. It is famous for its ubosot with some of the finest mural paintings and its vihara housing twenty ancient Buddha statues and featuring stucco reliefs on its outside walls depicting themes of the Ramayana epic.

Situatued on the bank of Khlong Makham, farther downstream variably known as Suphan Buri River, Nakhon Chai Si River and Tha Chin River, and surrounded by old tamarind trees, is the very old monastery of Wat Pak Khlong Makham Thao. It is known well beyond Chai Nat Province for

Wat Chom Khiri
Nak Phrot

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2 The bai sema is a stela, a sculpted stone slab shaped like a leaf. Just like leaves vary in shape, so do the neatly carved stelae. These bai sema are placed at the four corners and at the four points where the two central axes of any ordination hall, known as ubosot in Thai, intersect the alignment of the corner points. The bai sema demarcate the sacrosanct ground surrounding the ubosot inside any Buddhist monastery.
its traditional monk quarters, *kudi*, and its mural paintings of much more recent origin.

The historical centre of the area, now a small town in Chai Nat Province, is Sankha Buri on the banks of the Noi River. Already an old settlement by the name of *Phraek Si Ratcha*, or *Mueang Phraek*, or else *Phraek*, for short, by the time when it became a border town of the Sukhothai Kingdom, its name changed to *San Buri* in the Ayutthaya period. Remnants include sections of the city wall and moat. Two monasteries attest to its historical importance, Wat Phra Maha That and Wat Phra Kaeo. The landmark of Wat Maha That, also known as Wat Hua Mueang, which was built in 1354, are three Khmer-style towers or *prang* of a shape called *klip mafueang*, owing to their fluted spires that look like starfruit, also known as carambola. Moreover, there are the remains of an octagonal pagoda built early in the Ayutthaya Period, ruined chapels with seated Buddha images, and an *ubosot* with a gunwale-shaped base housing a statue of the Buddha seated beneath a hood or canopy of heads of the *Naga*, known as *Phra Nak Prok*, in the U’Thong style, and a seated Buddha statue, sculpted of sandstone in the Lop Buri style.
Another ancient monastery, Wat Phra Kaeo, built in 1457, is known for a chedi constructed in the Ayutthaya Period, blending elements of the Dvaravati with Khmer or Lop Buri styles. It houses an 800-year old Buddha image and a wooden, arched relic repository with ornamental details in the Sukhothai and Ayutthaya styles.

Authentic architectural features of the U Thong style erected upon a Khmer-style foundation characterize the monastery named Wat Phra Borommathat Wora Wihan, situated on the Chao Phraya River near Chai Nat Town. Its chedi of the U Thong Period shows Sivichayan influence, owing to its four facades with niches encasing seated Buddha images. Built on the ridge of a hill above the Chao Phraya River, in 1577, the monastery of Wat Thammamun Wora Wihan is a landmark of Chai Nat Province. Its Buddha statue of an imaginary epoch, with a lotus blossom on its head, looks like a blend of the late Chiang Saen and early Sukhothai styles with certain Ayutthaya style elements. The artisan’s imagination in creating an image seems to have been guided by Indian tradition such as Wheels of the Law and decorative grids depicted on palms of hands and soles of feet, and ankles decorated like those of a king lion. Other curious features are stelae, bai sema, made from red sandstone with chiselled Ayutthaya-style ornamentation.

At some distance downstream the Noi River, in Bang Rachan District of Sing Buri Province, is the ancient Noi River Pottery Site. Kilns were built there during 1371-1378, when King Phra Ngua had skilled people settled from defeated northern towns. As the nine excavated kilns show, they were large, of the roofed-boat shape, ruea prathun, and built of brick. Hence, they are called roofed kilns, tao prathun. Items manufactured include four-handled pots, jars, bowls, mortars, bottles, vases, gable tops, floor tiles, and water pipes. This archeological site, excavated since 1966, is located in the vicinity of Wat Phra Prang, a monastery with a Khmer-style tower or prang presumably constructed during the reign of King Narai [1656-1688]. Other noteworthy monasteries include Wat Phra Non Chak Si Wora Wihan, with one of the biggest reclining Buddha statues in Thailand that likely is very old owing to frequent
references in historical documents, and Wat Pho Kao Ton, also known as Wat Mai Daeng, with the statue of the liberator Phra Achan Thammachot in its vihara. The monastery was registered as a national monument in the year 1955.

**Lop Buri - the Second-Rank Capital City of Siam**

In the eastern part of the central plain, in the upstream basin of the Lop Buri River, restoration of Khmer-style monuments in the town of Lop Buri, largely abandoned after the demise of the Khmer Empire, was started by royal command of King Ramesuan [1369-1370 and 1388-1395]. At that time, Wat Phra Si Rattana Maha That with its magnificent and imposing pagoda, *prang*, the tallest in Lop Buri, was rebuilt on the ruins of an earlier Mahayana Buddhist temple. Likewise, Wat Nakhon Kosa was built in an ancient site with remnants from both the Dvaravati and Khmer periods. The existence of a natural water reservoir, *Ang Sap Lek*, since time immemorial, provided secure water supply to the revitalization of the former town of Lawo. Renamed Lop Buri, the town was made a second-rank capital of the Kingdom of Siam, or Ayutthaya Kingdom rather, as it was widely known.

During the relatively short span of time of about three decades, in the reign of King Narai the Great [1656-1688], construction activities of an amazing array were launched and completed. That period is the more astounding as simultaneously entirely new buildings were constructed, the Ayutthaya-style architecture was refined, with Persian and European architectural details.
blended in, some edifices were built in European style, and ruins of the preceding Dvaravati, Khmer and Sukhothai periods restored. The intentions of conserving the local cultural heritage in its rich diversity, the appreciation of foreign styles along with appropriate techniques, and the creation of what is known as the Lop Buri style have turned into unique monuments, to lasting effect.

Prominent among structures built in the second half of the 17th century is the palace of King Narai, known as Phra Narai Ratchaniwet. Built during 1665-1677, this palace was originally situated by the Lop Buri River, with connecting ramps and stairs, owing to the fact that communication and transportation were largely waterborne, exclusively so the movements of the royal court between Ayutthaya and Lopburi. From the waterfront, it once offered a grandiose view of palace walls and some of its eleven gates.

Remnants of fortifications are the historical city fort known as Pom Tha Po, situated at the river bank to the north of the royal palace, and the one called Pom Chai Chana Songkhram located to its east.

On an island in the Chup Son Lake, Thale Chup Son, a reservoir created by constructing a dam, once the main source of water supply for the city of Lop Buri. King Narai had a residence built, probably well before the year 1685. It was there that King Narai, accompanied by Jesuits and French envoys, observed the lunar eclipse on 11th December 1685 and the solar eclipse on 30th April 1688. Where the lake and island were, ruins remain of foundations, terraces and water gates.

The reservoir named Chup Son Lake served as the main source of water for the city of Lop Buri. King Narai had ordered the construction of a water supply system, designed by French and Venetian experts. Through water gates, elevated terracotta pipes laid out on specially designed walls, and cast-iron water
pipes, fresh water was channelled to the palace.

Dilapidated monuments restored on the order of King Narai include the edifice with the three-pagoda silhouette, Phra Prang Sam Yot, the monastery named Wat Phra Si Rattana Maha That, and the shrine called Thewa Sathan Prang Khaek, also known as Prang Khaek. The three-pagoda silhouetted Phra Prang Sam Yot, originally a Hindu sanctuary and transformed into a Mahayana Buddhist temple during the reign of King Jayavarman VII [1181-1220], was converted to a Theravada Buddhist temple, upon the addition of a vihara with European style portals and windows, and its consecration with Ayutthaya-style Buddha images dating from the 14th to 15th centuries.

The restored Wat Phra Si Rattana Maha That is one of best examples of Khmer regional art in the Lop Buri style. Its exceptionally large vihara, with Thai style portals and windows in Gothic French style, showing Persian influence in its pointed arch windows, houses splendid images of the Buddha. U Thong-style Buddha images were added at a later date. Built in the said reign, the ubosot has French style portals and windows. Within the outer perimeter of the monastery, there are pagodas called prang rai in the Ayutthaya Style, shaped like starfruit or carambola and, hence, known as klip mafueang, which are decorated with images of mountain deities showing facial features, square chin and connected eyebrows, in the U Thong style. In short, this monastery is a feast for the eyes.

The shrine named Thewa Sathan Prang Khaek is considered the oldest monument of Lop Buri. When a vihara was built in front of the shrine during the reign of King Narai, the main edifice of the shrine was restored. By royal command, a residence was built for the visiting ambassador of the King of France, Chevalier de Chaumont. Its compound

Phra Prang Sam Yot
included a Roman Catholic chapel serving as a Jesuit church, locally known as Wat San Paulo, various living quarters, water tanks, and fountains. Called Vichayen House, it served as the residence of Constantin Phaulcon alias Vichayen, advisor to King Narai.

At the monastery of Wat Lai on the banks of the Bang Kham River, the stucco decoration of the chapel displays a masterpiece of exquisite craftsmanship in the Ayutthaya Style.

**In the Proverbial “Rice Bowl” and Thereabouts**

In the midst of the fertile plain that is eminently suitable for wet rice cultivation, in the proverbial rice bowl as reflected in the name of Ang Thong Province, lies Kham Yat Palace, residence of King Uthumphon [1758], the 33rd king of Ayutthaya. The ruin of the edifice with five rooms and front and rear verandahs, built on elevated ground, is a registered historical monument.

Many spots in the landscape of Ang Thong Province, which are barely elevated above the water level of seasonal inundation, in historical time, are dotted with monasteries. While few are deserted ruins such as Vihara Daeng with three seated Buddha images and pediments with stucco decoration, built on a terrace and encircled by a wall, others exist to this day. Riversides are strung with monasteries situated on their high river banks. Some such are Wat Ton Son with a beautiful seated Buddha image known as Somdet Phra Si Mueang Thong; Wat Pa Mok known for its very large sala with a three-tiered roof, one restored vihara showing traces of old frescoes and faded mural paintings and another vihara with a reclining Buddha statue; Wat Tha Sutthawat at a ford where Thai armies heading toward the west used to cross the river; and Wat Khoi on the Noi River, well-known for its fish sanctuary named Wang Pla Wat Khoi and its museum with boats of various types used locally.

Among other monasteries are Wat Sa Kaeo, built in 1699, which houses a large orphanage; and Wat Khian with splendid mural paintings showing scenes from the war with Burma in the 18th century, a rarity owing to its unique compositions.

The town of Saraburi is believed
to have been founded in the year 1548 and, hence, constructed during the reign of King Maha Chakraphat [1548-1569]. One of the finest examples of classic architecture in Thailand originally built by Ayutthaya kings and completed during the reign of King Song Tham (1610-1628) is the sanctuary of Wat Phra Buddha Bat in Saraburi Province. Beginning in 1606, upon the discovery of Lord Buddha’s Footprint in the reign of King Ekathosarat [1605-1610], a pagoda of the monodop variant was built over it. Stairs flanked by five-headed, mythical serpents, naga, lead up to the hilltop where the sanctuary stands.

The deserted, ancient site of U Thong in Suphan Buri Province was resettled in the 17th century. Some of its archaeological treasures are preserved at the U Thong National Museum, while others are displayed by the National Museum in Bangkok. Among the latter is the U Thong Copper Inscription which, in Sanskrit, narrates the exchange of gifts between the rulers named Phra Chao Si Hatsavarom and Phra Si Mutta Umratagayasuan.

In the fringe of the old town of Suphan Buri is the sprawling, 13-hectare compound of the magnificent monastery named Wat Pa Lelai Wora Wihan, built during the Ayutthaya period. Its mighty vihara with a gunwale-shaped base typical of the Ayutthaya Period has a three-tiered roof that is about 25.50 metres high, 23.30 metres wide and 30.10 metres long. The Mon-style primary pagoda was built in 1181.

In the compound of the monastery named Wat Phra Sri Rattana Maha That stands a tall prang built in the U Thong Period, as evident from the construction technique that differs from that of the Ayutthaya Period. It bears the replica of an inscription in the ancient Khom or Khmer characters and Pali language with the narration of its construction on the order of King Maha Chakraphat, to house the ashes of Lord Buddha. The original is kept at the National Museum in Bangkok.

The monastery called Wat Phra Rup, built early in the Ayutthaya Period, houses a reclining Buddha image named Phra Phuttha Rup Pang Saiyat and locally known as Nen Kaeo. It features the most beatic face among all other images of the same period. Another rare, unique
treasure is Lord Buddha’s Footprint on wood, the only one of its kind existing in Thailand.

**Restoration of the Ancient Built Environment**

The resurrection of the Kingdom of Siam upon the destruction of the ancient capital of Ayutthaya entailed the restoration of a great many historical monuments and the foundation of new buildings, in the process of rehabilitating devastated areas.

One such example is the monastery named Wat Nong Klap in present-day Nong Bua District of Nakhon Sawan Province, built during the reign of King Rama II [1809-1824]. Its worldly rather than spiritual significance lies in a huge collection of indigenous tools, implements and utensils. In Uthai Thani Town, the monastery of Wat Ubosatharam, formerly known as Wat Bot Manorom, was built beginning in 1781. Its unique structures displaying various architectural features include an octagonal pagoda called mondop, an ubosot with a Sukhothai-style Buddha image and mural paintings, a vihara with a Rattanakosin-style Buddha image and mural paintings on its inside as well as outside walls, and three chedi, one each in the Ayutthaya, Sukhothai and Rattanakosin style, built to welcome King Rama V [1868-1910] in the year 1906. From the monastery of Wat Sangkat Rattana Khiri steps lead to the adjacent hilltop. There, buildings house a replica of Buddha’s Footprint and a statue of the father of King Rama I [1782-1809]. Wat Thammakhosok used to be the venue for the ritual of the Oath of Allegiance to the King. Its ubosot has some of the finest mural paintings, and its vihara houses twenty ancient Buddha statues. Outside wall stucco reliefs depict themes of the Ramayana epic.

On the bank of the Maharat Irrigation Canal in Chai Nat Province, Wat Indharam was built in 1847. Distinctive features include twin belfries, a swan pillar, and a hall set in the middle of a pond holding a large collection of Buddhist scriptures in Khom characters. On the west bank of the Chao Phraya River, Wat Phra Borommathat Wihan was built in 1867, incorporating remnants of a laterite, Khmer-style...
foundation and a pagoda or *prang* of the U Thong period showing Sivichayan influence such as its four facades with niches encasing seated Buddha images, and stone inscriptions dated as of the reign of King Thai Sa [1709-1733]. The very old monastery of Wat Pak Khlong Makham Thao features mural paintings by H.R.H. Prince Chumphon Khet Udomsak and his disciples. The lettering of the captions of some paintings is in the ancient Khom language, albeit written in the year 1890.

In Sing Buri Province, the monastery named Wat Sawang Arom has upheld a singularly significant artisanship. It is the centre of craftsmanship for the construction of chapels, both of the ubosot and vihara types, and for Buddha image sculpting. There, a technique has been preserved that was handed down from the Ban Chang Lo School in Thon Buri, now part of the Bangkok Metropolis. Moreover, the collection of 300 Nang Yai shadow-play puppets kept at this monastery is considered the most complete in Thailand.

The town of Lop Buri, largely deserted upon the demise of King Narai in 1688, and its palace, allowed to go to ruins, were gradually restored. King Rama III [1824-1851] re-established Lop Buri as an alternative, second-rank capital to Bangkok, and restored the Chanthara Phisan Throne Hall, which was refurbished to serve as a royal residence for King Rama IV [1851-
1868], who used Lop Buri as a recreational residence. By royal command, the palace restoration was resumed in the Fourth Reign, resulting in the conservation of the edifices named Dusit Sawan Thanya Mahaprasart and Sutha Sawan, King Narai’s residence, the reception hall in the inner courtyard, and the twelve treasure houses. Added was the edifice named Piman Mongkut as the residence of King Rama IV.

The shrine called San Phra Kan, restored in the 17th century and yet fallen into disrepair again, houses a small statue of a Hindu deity sculpted in the Sukhothai Style and a statue in the Lop Buri Style whose head got lost. At the taller statue’s rearside, a stone-head of the Buddha in the Ayutthaya style was attached, giving the ensemble a somewhat incongruous appearance. Given the fact that this image has been venerated by the people of Lop Buri, the crumbled roof of the shrine was repaired during the Fifth Reign (1868-1910).

During the reign of King Rama IV, the colossal seated Buddha image named Phra Maha Phuttha Phim, in the posture of meditation, was constructed in the monastery called Wat Chaiyo Wora Wihan, also known as Wat Ket Chaiyo, located in Ang Thong Province. The Somdet Wat Chaiyo amulets originating from there are deemed highly potent and, hence, very popular.

The sanctuary of Wat Phra Buddha Bat Ratcha Maha Wora Wihan in Saraburi Province, destroyed by Burmese invaders in 1765, was restored by royal command of King Rama I [1782-1809], early in the Rattanakosin Period. On the Pa Sak River, in Saraburi Province as well, the unique monastery named Wat Chanthaburi is situated. Although in poor repair, this Rattanakosin-style monastery, built in the Third Reign [1824-1851], has preserved walls covered with frescoes that presumably are the work of a Chinese artist. They feature ensembles of keenly observed real-world life scenes and render proof of the artist’s remarkable talent for colour.

The landmark of Suphan Buri Town, its magnificent Wat Pa Lelai Wora Wihan, was preserved upon royal command by King Rama IV [1851-1868]. The City Pillar Shrine, originally built in Thai style, was altered to a Chinese pavilion design.
HARNESSING OF WATER RESOURCES

The natural setting with its abundant water resources and fertile soils explains the wealth and might of realms. Moreover, it was conducive to fast recovery upon devastation caused by warfare.

Since historical time, the distribution of water for productive and strategic purposes was a growing concern. The many natural watercourses in the upper central plain with the entire provinces of Nakhon Sawan, Chai Nat, Sing Buri and Ang Thong, and large parts of the provinces of Uthai Thani, Lop Buri, Saraburi and Suphan Buri were harnessed by creating a network of canals. Examples are the irrigation canals, called khlong and named Cholapratthan, Nueng Sai, Song Sai and U Thong in Chai Nat Province, which typically are very long, running in north-south as well as east-west directions and intersecting many natural streams. Two large rivers, Chao Phraya and Noi, together with the canals called Bang Pun, Bang Chom Si, Lam Pho Chai and Karong virtually dissect the whole province of Sing Buri. Ang Thong Province and the lowland area of Suphan Buri Province, its larger part, are crisscrossed by waterways, natural and human-engineered.

One of the earliest rice bowls of Thailand, and the largest at that, owing to its vast area under seasonal inundation that ensured wet rice cultivation, including the now rare variety of floating rice, ancient and successive civilizations shaped this cradle of culture, society and economy. While permanent settlements in history were situated on high ground, the rural habitat adjusted to changing conditions, moving upward with the rising water level. One such example was the rural market of Ban Li in Song Phi Nong District of Suphan Buri Province, where the entire habitat was duplicated. Upon the onset of the rainy season, everyone and everything used to be moved upstairs for the period of waterborne interaction. This way of life characterized what scholars described as a hydraulic or amphibian society, referred to above as riparian society, owing to its proximity and dependency on water courses.

The characteristic alluvial clay is another important natural resource that has been used, to this day. In addition
to the various types of earthenware and ceramics known for centuries, new lines of production have emerged recently such as the court dolls manufactured at Ban Bang Sadet in Ang Thong Province.

Numerous wetlands, large and small, have a salutary effect on the environment and its plant as well as animal wildlife. Bueng Boraphet in Nakhon Sawan Province, Thailand’s largest swamp covering more than 200 sq km in the rainy season, is the habitat of 148 animal and 44 plant species. The Chawak Marsh in Chai Nat Province is both a breeding ground particularly for migratory birds, given its shallow ponds in the dry season, and a food crop producing area.

**ETHNIC DIVERSITY**

The native people are of mixed ancestry. While their majority are immersed into the mainstream of Thailand’s cultural and social traditions, several clusters of population retain traces of an earlier identity which make for the attractive and enriching diversity of the populace-at-large.

People from Chiang Saen in the far north of contemporary Thailand had been settled in Saraburi Province, where they have upheld their craft of producing hand-woven Sao Hai fabrics.

Various groups of people from areas east of the Mekong River, in contemporary Laos, were settled in the Central Plain. Those who identify themselves as Lao Khrang have formed communities in the provinces of Nakhon Sawan and Uthai Thani. The Lao Kung in Chai Nat Province trace their origin back to either Vientiane or Luang Prabang in present-day Laos and settled late in the 18th century and early in the 19th century, respectively. In Suphan Buri Province, the Lao Wiang preserved old crafts and skills. Common to these population groups are their distinctive patterns of woven fabric from home-spun yarn, originally dyed using natural, locally available substances.

Communities in the upstream river basins are few, where people
identify themselves as Mon. Examples are five communities in Nong Saeng District of Saraburi Province. In Mueang District of this province, some people refer to their ancestors as being Khom.

About 200 years ago, a group of Karen were granted permission to settle in Dan Chang District of Suphan Buri Province. In Taphoenkhi, their descendants have preserved their ancestors’ culture and way of life.

About 400 years ago, before the reign of King Naresuan [1590-1605], a group of Bugi captives, notorious pirates plying the sea routes between the peninsula under Siamese suzerainty and the island sultanates, were settled in the present-day subdistrict of Chawai in Chaiyo District of Ang Thong Province. Their descendants are known as the Ban Chawai Muslims.

Descendants of Chinese immigrants cluster in the cities and towns in the upstream river basins of the Central Plain. For example, Nakhon Sawan Town is home to numerous Thai citizens whose ancestors migrated from China, over a century ago. The first settlers took up trade and commerce. As their business prospered, the town became an important trading centre.

In Lop Buri Province, the monastery situated on the Khao Wong Phra Chan mountain ridge, Wat Khao Phra Chan, attracts worshippers of Chinese descent from near and far. On the occasion of the annual Mahayana Buddhism pilgrimage, they would come in large numbers to venerate the Buddha image, in conjunction with worshipping at Wat Phra Phuttha Bat Ratcha Maha Wora Wihan in neighbouring Saraburi Province.

As stated in a document published by the Office of the National Culture Commission, “all these ethnic groups are fully assimilated and consider themselves Thais.”

**INTERFACING OF DEVELOPMENT WITH PRESERVATION**

Throughout this subregion, modernity and tradition co-exist. Extending southward from the topographical point where the vast central plain of Thailand has its origin, in hydro-geological perspective, its significance as the source of life-bearing water for the erstwhile rice bowl downstream was further enhanced, in the recent past. There, the
large Chao Phraya Dam is located, completed in 1957, with 16 outlets channelling water into irrigation canals that serve several areas in the central plain. The dam’s lock chamber makes the river navigable over its entire length, from Nakhon Sawan in the north to Samut Prakan at the Gulf of Thailand. The modern, northern-most river harbour of Nakhon Sawan was built to handle bulk transportation by container vessels.

Nature reserves, no-hunting zones, conservation of the built environment, and establishment of museums highlight the significance and appreciation of the diverse cultural heritage by the public and private sectors in contemporary Thailand. Such museums as the provincial branches of Thailand’s National Museum, the Phoet Ban Pong Manao Museum displaying objects of early history excavated at a site called Ban Chiang Ton Plai and the Wat Yang Na Rangsi Boat Museum, both in Lop Buri Province, or the Thai Rice Farmers Museum focused on tools, rites, and the role of royalty in paddy cultivation, in Suphan Buri Province, shed light on the broad spectrum of past accomplishments that constitute not solely the subregion’s historical foundation but an essential cornerstone of the national identity.

Tradition is upheld in many ways. Given the vital importance of the waterways, two appropriate examples are the living on raft or boat houses and the boat races. Moored against both banks of the Sakae Krang River in Uthai Thani Province are scores of boat-houses, erected on bamboo rafts. They reflect the simple and serene way of life of people who make a living from fishery using traps and creels. Boat races are important cultural and social events. In October, such major annual regattas take place in Ang Thong Province on the Chao Phraya River and on the Noi River. Famous boats from all over the country would compete for the coveted trophies.
The wide alluvial plain has been expanding southward toward the Gulf through steady silting and sedimentation by its rivers, since time immemorial. At the convergence of the Chao Phraya, Lop Buri and Pa Sak rivers, the city of Ayutthaya became the centre of the historical Kingdom of Siam and the seat of supremacy over neighbouring territories. The early history of the city of Ayutthaya encapsulates as well the origins of large-scale hydraulic engineering for communication and transportation, for security and safety, using water as a means of fortification and defense, beyond the vital purposes of supply and drainage.

Anchored through backward linkages reaching deep into the interior, secured mainly in its insular location and by a buffer of vast stretches of malaria infested wetlands toward the coast, and acting as the gateway for the outside world, Ayutthaya was capital city for more than four centuries (1350-1767). As a “hydraulic society” adapted to a riparian way of life, Ayutthaya flourished as an entrepôt of foreign trade, in certain aspects as a major link between the West and the East, and internally as Siam’s commercial centre par excellence. By royal assent, trading posts, also known as “factories”, were established by the Chinese, Japanese and Persians, followed by Europeans with the Portuguese, first, in 1551, as well as by the Dutch, English, Spaniards and French.

The marshes of the downstream river plains were the site where the earliest example of public infrastructure was put in place. The Chao Phraya River course was corrected such as by digging the canal to create a short-cut, during the reign of King Chai Racha (1534-1547), between the present-day mouths of the canals, khlong in Thai, named Bangkok Noi and

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1 All historical data, i.e. years and centuries, refer to the chronology of the Western Calendar.
Bangkok Yai. That short-cut and another one at Pak Kret, dug in the reign of King Thai Sa in 1721 so as to further shorten travelling distance and time, became stretches of the broad main river, as it appears nowadays. More canals were dug mainly in east-west direction to connect rivers and, thus, create a network of watercourses for improved communication and transportation, typically in parallel to the coastline.

During the four centuries shaped by the monarchs who ruled out of Ayutthaya, the downstream plains were settled by both Thai and members of ethnic groups granted refuge such as the Mon and Makassars. The heritage of these settlements has been preserved. There are virtually intact settlements such as Pak Kret in Nonthaburi Province, where many locals still speak the Mon language, and there are the Muslim communities of descendants maintaining traditional community life around mosques in the provinces of Ayutthaya, Pathum Thani and Nonthaburi. Fostering the establishment of such settlements facilitated the recruitment of the labour force required for the construction of such major infrastructure as Khlong Maha Chai, connecting areas to the west, and Khlong Saen Saep, connecting areas to the east, which in their significance for Siam were comparable to China’s Grand Canal.

In recent history, from the late 19th century to the early 20th century, the huge wetlands to the north of the city of Bangkok were transformed into a productive area through large-scale land consolidation. The grid of ditches and canals draining the
erstwhile marsh by natural gravity and feeding into the Rangsit Canal function as irrigation canals, by now, supplying most parts of the provinces of Pathum Thani and Nonthaburi.

The wide alluvial plain was created as the silting of sediments carried by the rivers kept pushing the coastline southward. This natural process is still going on. It necessitates the dredging of the main stream, the Chao Phraya River, and of its estuary. It also explains why large ocean vessels had to anchor off-coast, outside the mudflat called “Bar of Siam”, and why there is need for the newly constructed deep-sea port of Laem Chabang at the Eastern Seaboard. Given the vast inland-area well endowed with resources, the river has been its gateway. The littoral marshes and the swamps of the estuary, sparsely populated and infested with malaria, served as a virtual buffer zone offering protection from seaborne attacks and piracy. Located upstream at safe distance, the city of Ayutthaya, former capital of Siam and the country’s commercial centre, was both Siam’s gateway to the world and the gateway to Siam plied by foreign interlopers from Asia and Europe, for four centuries.

**PREHISTORY AND EARLY HISTORY**

In prehistoric time, safe grounds for settlements were at somewhat higher elevation, at the eastern and western rims of the central plain, well above the level of its seasonal inundation. This is evident from the earliest settlements thought to be up to 3,000 years old, owing to archaeological excavations at the site named Dong Lakhon in Nakhon Nayok Province.

About 2,500 years ago, the plateau between the Central Plain and the Mae Klong River Basin was the core area of a realm known as Suwanna Phum. According to chronicles of the reign of the Indian Emperor Ashoka [274-232 B.C.], the capital city of Suwanna Phum, Thom Thong, at the site of present-day Nakhon Pathom Town, was the destination of Buddhist monks sent by the Emperor. They arrived in the year 308 B.C. Within one decade, the first temple was built in the year 297 B.C., named Buddha Baromathat. Later, a stupa was built to house relics of Lord Buddha. This first stupa was constructed in the shape of a reversed monk’s bowl similar to the Great Stupa at Sanchi in
Phra Pathom Chedi with the Buddha images of Dvaravati art style, Nakhon Pathom Province
India. Over the millennia, this stupa was built over, likely many times. Since 1853, when its reconstruction was nearly completed, it has been named Phra Pathom Chedi.

“First Borough”, Nagara Pratom, was how the ancient site was renamed. In all likelihood, it was the first destination of travellers from faraway shores to the west, among them Buddhist monks from the island of Sri Lanka. This explains the high esteem in which the town is held by Buddhists throughout Thailand.

MONUMENTS AND ARTEFACTS TRACED TO THE 6TH UNTIL 13TH CENTURIES
EXAMPLES OF THE DVARAVATI CULTURE

The ancient site, successively named Thom Thong, Nakhon Chai Si, and Mueang Nakhon Pathom, was the centre of one of the Mon realms in Mainland Southeast Asia. The centuries when their culture and civilization left a lasting imprint on the region are defined as the Dvaravati Period, approximately from the 6th to the 13th centuries. In Nakhon Pathom Town, the world’s tallest pagoda, chedi, the central edifice of the monastery named Wat Phra Pathom Chedi Ratcha Wora Wihan, is testimony to the Dvaravati culture. Upon remnants of older, successive structures, it was first built in the shape of a Sri Lankan stupa by the Mon, the native population of Lower Burma and Western Thailand, in the 10th century.

Situated nearby is Thailand’s probably oldest, preserved Buddhist monument, known as Chedi Phra Pathon, built in the Dvaravati style. Excavations yielded Buddha images, some sculpted from stone, others made from terracotta. An iron garuda figure, holding fast a snake, found at this site, was adopted as royal emblem beginning in the Sixth Reign (1910-1925). Other ruined structures, thought to have been built in the same period as the Phra Pathom Chedi, at which excavations yielded astounding artefacts in the Dvaravati style, are Noen Wat Phra Ngam with its tall chedi and its singularly superb Buddha head made from terracotta, and Wat Phra Men with Buddha images and artefacts. All these precious objects can be viewed in Bangkok’s National Museum.
Another ancient Dvaravati site is the outpost of historical Nakhon Chai Si at Kamphaeng Saen. Few remnants such as an earthen dyke and moat attest to its role of securing trade routes and access to the erstwhile nearby coast. There, at a site near present-day Khao Yi San Village in Amphawa District of Samut Songkhram Province, big-bellied jars with narrow inlets were excavated that contained earthenware, ceramics, human skeletons, and assorted utensils from the Dvaravati Period.

At the eastern rim of the Central Plain, in Nakhon Nayok Province, lies the ancient town named Dong Lakhon, locally known as Mueang Laplae. Pre-historic finds attest to the earliest habitat of some 3,000 years ago. Visible are the remnants of the town in an oval enclosure with the greatest expanse of 600 metres that was the centre of a Mon realm in the Dvaravati Period during the 6th to 8th centuries. Artefacts found there include fragments of bronze Buddha images, seals and gold ornaments. Among the objects are some which render evidence of relations with the Isaranupura Kingdom, also known as Chen La, and with Mueang Si Wat Sata Bura, also known as Dong Si Maha Pho.

MONUMENTS AND ARTEFACTS TRACED TO THE 9TH UNTIL 11TH CENTURIES
EXAMPLES OF THE KHOM - KHMER CULTURE

In the course of history, the ancient town of Dong Lakhon became the centre of a realm under Khom rule, from the 9th to the 11th centuries. The remains of the palace of a Khom queen and some artefacts in the Khmer style dating from the 11th century constitute an ensemble which was declared a national historical monument in 1935.

Farther to the west, the ancient town of Nakhon Pathom was conquered by the Khmer, given its strategic location as an eastern bridgehead of the link with South Asia in the west. In due course of successive restorations of the pre-eminent Buddhist stupa, the Phra Pathom Chedi, Khmer conquerors had it enlarged in the shape of a tower, prang, one of the characteristic architectural features of the Khmer style.
CONSOLIDATION OF THAI CULTURE AND POLITY FROM THE 13TH CENTURY ONWARD

Virtually wedged between the two former Khmer strongholds at the eastern and western rims of the Central Plain, the centre of power was shifted to the middle of the plain. At the site of present-day Nakhon Pathom Town, the Thai ruler Thao Sampom founded the city and realm of Thep Nakhon, in 1320. Known also as King Sirichai Chiang Saen, he expanded his territory toward the Central Plain, where his son U Thong founded the Ayutthaya Kingdom. King U Thong transformed the eastern, ancient site of Dong Lakhon into a fortified town and named it Nakhon Nayok.

On barely elevated ground amidst the floodplain, at just 3.5 metres above sea level, the new stronghold of Ayutthaya was established. This was feasible by applying the know-how that already was characteristic of the hydraulic culture and riparian socio-economic setting of the Thai. They had built the required capabilities by advancing knowledge and expertise over generations and centuries of settling in valleys wedged between mountains of the upper north, thereafter forming realms in the wider river plains of the lower north, and settling in upstream river basins of the Central Plain, albeit it has been prone to flooding.

The site chosen by King U Thong for his new residence is the isle of Nong Sano, with three rivers encompassing it: to the west and south the Chao Phraya River; to the east the Pa Sak River, which empties into the Chao Phraya River in the southeast; and the Lop Buri River in the north, which flows toward the west to empty into the Chao Phraya River, and is connected to the Pa Sak River via a canal. This insular, strategic site was the capital city of Siam for 417 years, from its foundation on 3rd April 1350 until its destruction by invaders in 1767.

Not only were the soils in the area around the new capital city fertile and well supplied with water, which made them eminently suitable for paddy cultivation, they also were of the geophysical property that serves as a resource for the production of construction material. That was plentiful at close distances, to meet the extremely high demand, over the centuries. For example, Bang Ban
District of Ayutthaya Province, located in an alluvial basin alongside the Chao Phraya River, to the north-west of the capital city, reputedly has very good clay that is excellent raw material for the production of especially strong bricks of beautiful colour.

Such bricks had already been made and used in the construction of buildings before the founding of Ayutthaya as the capital city. One well-preserved example of the approximately 1,000 Buddhist monasteries in Ayutthaya Province, at present half of them in ruins, is the monastery named Wat Phanan Choeng. Its vihara housing the 19 metre-tall Buddha statue in the posture of subduing Mara, known as Phra Chao Phanan Choeng, was built in the year 1325. Another example farther downstream on the bank of the Chao Phraya River is Wat Phai Lom in present-day Pathum Thani Province.

Eminent edifices of the Ayutthaya period in and around Ayutthaya City, some preserved and most restored, are far too numerous to be listed hereunder. In chronological order of successive reigns, examples give a representative overview. The original structure of the monastery known as Wat Yai Chai Mongkhon was built in 1357 by royal command of King U Thong, also known as King Rama Thibodi I [1350-1369]. Situated outside the city isle, King U Thong had it named Wat Pa Kaeo. In the precinct of the monastery known as Wat Phra Si San Phet three outstanding Sri Lankan-style pagodas were built during the 15th century to enshrine the ashes of three kings. On the order of King Ramesuan [1369-1370 and 1388-1395], in the period between the king’s first and second reigns, the tall pagoda in the compound of Wat Phra Mahathat was built in 1384. To the west of the city wall, the Wang Lang or “Rear Palace” was constructed on the order of King Maha Thammaracha [1569-1590], presumably as residence for his second son, eventually King Ekathosarot [1605-1610]. The Chandrakasem Palace, officially the Wang Na or “Front Palace”, was built by royal command of King Maha Thammaracha as well. It originally served as residence of the then Crown Prince, thereafter King Naresuan [1590-1605], and seven successive kings. In the precinct of the, then, old monastery of Wat Pa
Kaeo, a huge pagoda or chedi was built in 1592, on the order of King Naresuan to commemorate his victory over Burmese invaders. In this vein, the monastery was renamed Wat Yai Chai Mongkhon. By royal command of King Prasat Thong [1629-1656], the magnificent monastery named Wat Chai Watthanaram was built on the bank of the Chao Phraya River. Its tall, superb main tower, prang, virtually towering above surrounding towers together form a splendid ensemble in a style reflecting ancient Khmer architecture.

Forts and fortresses, most of them situated at waterway intersections, enabled the besieged city of Ayutthaya to hold out even when beleaguered by enemies for long spans of time. Examples are the forts (known as pom in Thai) named Maha Chai, Phet, Ho Rat Chakhru, Chit Khop, Champa Phon, and Yai. It was treason that led to the fall of the city in 1767. The monastery called Wat Na Phra Men, on the bank of the Sa Bua Canal, was the only major one to survive the Burmese onslaught.

Asian and European Concessions along the Gateway to Siam

Outside Ayutthaya City, south of the fort called Pom Phet, which is situated at the confluence of the Pa Sak and Chao Phraya rivers, Ayutthaya kings had granted land to groups of foreigners on both banks of the Chao Phraya River where to settle, establish trading posts and build churches.

Merchant from China, Ryu Kyu, Japan and Persia had obtained permission to set up trading posts as early as in the 14th century. The first Europeans to make contact with the Kingdom of Siam were the Portuguese. As early as 1511 they obtained a concession at the coast of Malacca, then under Siamese suzerainty, granted by King Rama Thibodi II [1491-1529], who also concluded the first treaty with the Portuguese in 1518. Upon the arrival in Ayutthaya of Duarte Fernandes in 1551, during the reign of King Maha Chakraphat [1548-1569], the Portuguese were given land to settle, set up their trading post, build houses, form their community, the so-called Portuguese Quarter, known as Mu Ban Portuket in Thai, and build...
churches as well as a cemetery. Some Portuguese men and many of their descendants from marriages with local women served in Ayutthaya’s military forces.

Japanese Christians, who had fled persecution in their country, were granted refuge and given land to establish their community, known as Mu Ban Yipun. They were instrumental in trading with Japan and the Ryūkyū Kingdom.

In the reign of King Naresuan [1590-1605], Siam concluded a treaty with the Dutch, based at Batavia on the island of Java, in 1604. The Dutch had, then, been granted land by King Prasat Thong [1629-1656] at the mouth of the Chao Phraya River. Thereupon, they were given permission to establish their “factory” in the south of Ayutthaya City, of which a building remains called Tuek Daeng. An English settlement was located across from the Portuguese Quarter, on the east bank of the Chao Phraya River. The French Mission to Siam, though mainly accommodated in Lop Buri, the second capital of King Narai [1656-1688], was also granted land outside the city of Ayutthaya.

At the mouth of the Chao Phraya River, on its west bank, the Dutch were granted land by King Ekathosarat [1605-1610] to establish their trading post, which they named New Amsterdam. Tidal erosion and neglect led to its dilapidation. Remnants are still visible, situated in present-day Phra Samut Chedi District of Samut Prakan Province.
To the south of the capital city of Ayutthaya, King Prasat Thong [1629-1656] had a palace built on a riverine isle at Bang Pa-in, along with the monastery named Wat Chumphon Nikayaram.

At the mouth of the river named after the port of Tha Chin, known as Suphan Buri River in its upstream and mid-stream sections and as Nakhon Chai Si River in its downstream section above its estuary, Chinese junks called since early in the history of Siam. In 1548, the port was renamed Sakhon Buri. After the Maha Chai Canal linking Bangkok with the Tha Chin River had been dug, in 1704, by royal command of King Suea [1703-1709], the name of the town was changed to Maha Chai. This harbour town was renamed Samut Sakhon in the Fourth Reign.

Farther to the west, in the estuary of the Mae Klong River, a navy camp was established on the order of King Ekathosarot [1605-1610], known as Khai Bang Kung. It is located in present-day Samut Songkhram Province. In its compound is a chapel with a large stucco Buddha image and mural paintings.

Continuity appears to have been ensured soon upon the fall of Ayutthaya, the former capital city of Siam. Although the oldest settlements that were spared destruction date from the Sukhothai Period, and others trace their origin from the Ayutthaya Period, many were founded early in the Rattanakosin era, while by far most are relatively young.

Historical settlements are clustered along the Chao Phraya River and in its immediate, undulating hinterland. Toward the east, an area four times as large had been a vast marshy land, throughout history. This was the erstwhile situation in present-day Pathum Thani Province. The area-at-large underwent a metamorphosis that is characteristic for change and development in Thailand. This is best related by referring to the successive reigns, owing to the fact that Thai monarchs had directly intervened and kept the process intensifying. Examples from throughout the central plain with its downstream river basins are called up hereunder.
Monasteries built or restored in the coastal area include Wat Bang Khai Yai with beautiful mural paintings depicting Thai-Burmese wars, and Wat Chulamani, with adjacent residences of the queens of King Rama I and King Rama II. Both monasteries are located in present-day Samut Songkhram Province. On the banks of a canal dug to link the ends of a bend in the course of the Chao Phraya River shaped like an ox-bow, near present-day Phra Pradaeng in Samut Prakan Province, two monasteries were built facing each other, in 1822. They are Wat Phaichayon Phonasaep, to whose ubosot the image of the “Emerald Buddha” had been transferred from Wat Arun before its onward transfer to Wat Phra Kaeo, and Wat Protket Chettharam, with a picturesque temple set in a Chinese-style garden.

While visiting Mueang Sam Khok on the west bank of the Chao Phraya River, already a very old Mon settlement, by then, surrounded by ponds abundant with lotus plants in full bloom, King Rama II bestowed upon that town the new name of Pathum Thani, ‘lotus town’. 

NEW HOMELAND FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS, REFUGEES, AND WAR CAPTIVES

The map of the Lower Central Plain is dotted with settlements whose communities are of Mon origin. It has been observed that Mon people prefer to live in groups defined by their ancestry. The oldest settlements date from the Sukhothai Period. Others trace their origin from the Ayutthaya Period, many were founded early in the Rattanakosin Period, while by far most are relatively young. Throughout history, monarchs of Siam granted refuge to groups of Mon people who had fled from their homeland around their historic capital city of Hongsawadi, or Pegu in present-day Myanmar. This is evident from existing communities
and especially their Buddhist monasteries. These are typically located along the major rivers, mainly in the provinces of Pathum Thani, Nonthaburi, Samut Sakhon, Samut Songkhram and Samut Prakan.

The monastery of Wat Bot, located in Mueang District of Pathum Thani Province, was built by Mon refugees from Hongsawadi, capital city of the historical kingdom of Pegu, in 1621. Among the impressive Mon style artefacts of Wat Bot are swan poles and a metal-cast, four-headed elephant. The nearby monastery of Wat Chedi Thong was reconstructed by Mon immigrants at the ancient site, upon the battlement of red sandstone, dating from the Ayutthaya Period. It is well known for its bell-shaped, golden stupa with a nine-tiered umbrella and its Mon-style Buddha images. Another example is Wat Hong Pathumawat, built in 1764 and situated in Pathum Thani Town, with a chedi and a vihara that are replicas of those in Hongsawadi, the capital city of the Mon homeland.

Further south, on the banks of the Chao Phraya River, in the area of Nonthaburi, Mon refugees as well settled. The monastery named Wat Chomphuwek is famous for Lord Buddha’s Footprint, believed to have either been created by Mon artisans, or to have been taken from their native place in the ancient kingdom of Hongsawad, in the region of Pegu in present-day Myanmar. This Footprint of the Buddha is deemed the oldest known in Thailand. Other treasures include mural paintings dating from the middle of the Ayutthaya Period and especially a painting of Mother Earth that is praised as the most beautiful of its kind in Thailand.

In the reign of King Tak Sin [1768-1782], Mon immigrants led by such notables of their own aristocracy as Phraya Cheng were welcome to settle and build productive communities such as Mueang Sam Khok in 1774, later renamed Pathum Thani. Typically, they were clustered around monasteries such as Wat Ku and Wat Poramai Yikawat, both in
Nonthaburi Province. Wat Poramai Yikawat, well-known for its Mon-style, reclining Buddha image sculpted from marble and its mural paintings, is situated on Kret Island, created by digging a canal to connect two bends of an ox-bow of the Chao Phraya River in 1721, on the order of King Thai Sa [1709-1733]. Mon refugees were allowed to settle there. They earned themselves a fine reputation for their distinctive style of pottery.

Another example is the perhaps most prominent Mon community, that of Phra Pradaeng in Samut Prakan Province. It is known as Mon Pak Lat, the group of people who had found refuge, first, in the upstream area of Sam Khok in present-day Pathum Thani Province and were relocated in 1814, on the order of King Rama II, to the fortified town of Nakhon Khuean Khan, renamed Phra Pradaeng in 1915. A canal dug to connect both ends of an oxbow in the course of the Chao Phraya River so as to serve as short-cut for waterborne transportation, called Pak Lat in Thai, explains the designation of this particular group, the Mon Pak Lat people.

Descendants of Makassars, who had been granted land to settle near the capital city of Ayutthaya in the 16th century, form closely-knit Muslim communities in Ayutthaya Province. During the First Reign, that of King Buddha Yod Fah Chulalok (Rama I) [1782-1809], upon the suppression of a rebellion by Muslims in Pattani in the south, Malay captives were resettled in locations of present-day Ayutthaya Province. Following another rebellion in Pattani, more Malays were settled in in the provinces of Ayutthaya and Pathum Thani, during the Third Reign. Dating from that time are their communities such as Ban Din in Ayutthaya Province, where the Muslims strictly follow their religious rules and speak their own patois, a mixture of Malay and Thai vocabularies.

Captives of wars fought with Cambodia and taken from there, who were natives of Annam in present-day central Vietnam, were also settled in the plain that forms part of contemporary Pathum Thani Province.

Another ethnic group is that of the Lao Song, also known as Thai Song, in Nakhon Pathom Province. They are descendants of natives of areas east of the Mekong River, in
present-day Laos. Some of them were resettled during the First Reign (1782-1809) and others during the Third Reign (1824-1851). Their ethnic identity is preserved through their weaving of cotton fabric featuring customary striped black-and-white patterns.

Descendants of Chinese immigrants cluster in towns and market centres. Their assimilation and acculturation to the host country has resulted in their integration into the mainstream population. Their adhering to and upholding of certain traditions characteristically becomes evident through the celebration of festivities according to the Chinese lunar calendar. The foremost such event is Chinese New Year, when entire communities stage elaborate festivities.

To some extent, the delightful variety of things that are part and parcel of everyday-life reflects the ethnic diversity in the population of the Lower Central Plain. Examples of local communities that have preserved their ethnic identity, to a larger or lesser extent, are many. Fortunately, the preservation of ethnic diversity is widely appreciated.

As stated in a document published by the Office of the National Culture Commission, “all these ethnic groups are fully assimilated and consider themselves Thais.”

**EARLY EXAMPLES OF THE RESTORATION OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT**

In the first half of the 18th century, Prince Sena Phithak, also known as Prince Thamma Dhibet, author of literary works and of one of the greatest Thai poems entitled “Boat Saga”, had taken it upon himself to restore buildings in ancient monasteries.
Late in the 18th century, the navy camp called Bang Kung, in Samut Songkhram Province, by then almost two hundred years old, was restored. By royal command of King Tak Sin, Chinese subjects from Rayong, Chon Buri, Ratchaburi and Kanchanaburi had to maintain the camp. Hence, the camp became known as Bang Kung Chin.

Wat Khema Phirataram in Nonthaburi is an early example of royal concern and initiative to preserve historic monuments. Work to preserve that Ayutthaya-period monastery was started on the order of King Rama II.

During the Fourth Reign, that of King Mongkut (Rama IV) [1851-1868], more restoration was done, some in continuation of work commenced earlier, yet most newly launched. The monarch’s great concern was the preservation of the cultural heritage. Like in Sukhothai and in Lop Buri, King Mongkut focused attention on monuments in the former capital city of Ayutthaya and on the oldest Buddhist site in his kingdom, in present-day Nakhon Pathom Town.

By royal command, Chandra Kasem Palace in Ayutthaya Town, originally built for King Naresuan when still Crown Prince, was restored. Among the reconstructed buildings are the integrated section of the old city wall and a pavilion with a four-gabled roof, once used to view royal barge processions. All these and a four-storey observatory, added on the king’s order, were completed in 1863. At the same time, the restoration was started of the palace built by King Prasart Thong, in 1629, on an isle at Bang Pa-in.

At the ancient site of a centre of Dvaravati civilization, abandoned after the defeat of Khmer occupants in the 12th century, the oldest Buddhist site in Siam, now Thailand, was restored by royal command. In due course of the reconstruction of the pagoda, hence named Phra Pathom Chedi, a new settlement emerged, the present-day town of Nakhon Pathom. King Mongkut had this new pagoda built, superimposing the original stupa, beginning in 1853, and named it Phra Pathom Chedi. It is the highest stupa in the world, with a height measuring 120.45 metres and a
circumference at the base of 234.75 metres.

Renovation of Wat Khema Phirataram, in present-day Nonthaburi Province, was carried on, by royal command, and completed. The fort named Phra Chedi Klang Nam, situated on an island in the Chao Phraya River, by then, and nowadays in Samut Prakan Province, was repaired and enlarged, in 1860.

During the Fifth Reign, that of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) [1868-1910], restoration and conservation of the cultural heritage were continued. Among the many such ventures are the completion of the restoration of the Bang Pa-in Palace and of the monastery named Wat Chumphon Nikayaram, to which edifices in the European style were added, on the king's order and advice. This resulted in creating a much-admired landmark in Ayutthaya Province, to this day.

The only fort (called pom in Thai) left of originally five, built early in the 19th century at the mouth of the Chao Phraya River, named Phlaeng Fai Fa, was restored, on the King’s order of King Rama V.

In Nonthaburi Province, Wat Khema Phirataram, built in the Ayutthaya period and renovated during the Second through the Fourth Reigns was listed as a historical monument in the year 1895. This is, hence, one of the earliest, if not the very earliest example of registering a historical monument as a national heritage site.

During the Sixth Reign, that of King Vajiravudh (Rama VI) [1910-1925], the successive reconstruction and simultaneous restoration resulted in the creation of today’s magnificent edifice named Phra Pathom Chedi in the centre of the monastery known as Wat Phra Pathom Chedi Racha Wora Vihan, in Nakhon Pathom Town. Its spacious site houses precious Buddha statues, including the venerated Phra Ruang Rochanarit statue and an ancient, solemn Buddha image in the Dvaravati style sculpted from a single block of white quartzite. The premises have four vihara, a conversation hall, monk quarters, sacro-
sanct trees, stupa replicas, two museums and a ceremonial image hall. The ashes of the remains of King Vajiravudh (Rama VI), who had ordered the renovation to be completed, are enshrined there.

The conservation of ancient buildings, initiated in the early 18th century, was stepped up to cover entire ensembles of monuments, structures, buildings, and quarters of towns. Examples from the first half of the 20th century are the ancient site of Dong Lakhon, in Nakhon Nayok Province, and the monastery of Wat Yai Chom Prasat, in Samut Sakhon Province, both registered as national historical monuments in 1935 and 1936, respectively.

During the present reign, in the year 1956, excavations at the monastery of Wat Phra Mahathat in Ayutthaya Province led to the discovery of most precious items including a relic of Lord Buddha, several golden Buddha images, and objects made from gold and studded with rubies, concealed in a tall pagoda built in 1384, by command of King Ramesuan [1369-70 and 1388-95]. In 1980, the Phlaeng Fai Fa Fort in Samut Prakan Province was registered as a historical monument. The historical capital city isle of Ayutthaya, where 33 kings of successive dynasties had resided and
ruled for 417 years, was registered by the UNESCO as a World Heritage Site, on 13 December 1991. Somewhat earlier, the Portuguese Village, known in Thai as Mu Ban Portuket, established to the south of the capital city, on the west bank of the Chao Phraya River in 1551, was preserved as a historical site complete with a museum, in 1984.

One of the finest examples, world-wide, of an open-air museum is the Ancient City, known in Thai as Mueang Boran, situated on Sukhumvit Road in Samut Prakan Province. Laid out in an area of 128 hectares, construction of this historical park was started in 1963. Upon Their Majesties’ gracious invitation, the park was inaugurated by H. M. Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom, while on a state visit to Thailand, in 1972. Its superb landscaping envelops replicas of existing monuments throughout Thailand, built at reduced scale. It has notably wooden structures moved into the park for restoration and preservation, including buildings of dilapidated monasteries, a palatial residence, market buildings, and farmsteads. Moreover, long-lost buildings were recreated, based on historical accounts and drawings or paintings. Perhaps the most splendid example is the replica of the San Phet Prasat Throne Hall, whose original was destroyed upon the fall of Ayutthaya, in 1767. The marvellous ensemble of structures representing all regions of the Kingdom and comprising examples representing its social classes, faiths, major ethnic groups, and occupations has served to uphold traditional crafts and know-how, owing to the continual demand for skilled artisans. The foundation-in-charge sponsors research and publishes a learned journal as well as scholarly books.

Throughout the Lower Central Plain, tradition is kept alive, indeed, at such locations as the Don Wai Market, a fascinating, old riverside community in Nakhon Pathom Province. Its residents maintain many facets of the old ways of Thailand’s
countryside. Equally impressive are the floating markets. Examples are the one in the vicinity of the monastery named Wat Lamphaya, Nakhon Pathom Province; the one known as Tha Kha in Samut Songkhram Province, which is beyond the beaten track and, hence, reflects the traditional way of life, in beautiful natural surroundings, unobtrused by tourism, with its market schedule governed by the lunar calendar, to this day; and, best known of all, the officially promoted tourism attraction, since 1967, of nearby Damnoen Saduak in Ratchaburi Province.

BULWARKS AGAINST SEABORNE ATTACKS AND COLONIAL INTERVENTION

Initiatives by the monarchs of the Royal House of Chakri have had strong impacts on the course of development. Securing the mouth of the Chao Phraya River was recognized as a necessity, with the new capital city of Bangkok so much closer to the sea than Ayutthaya, the former capital city. Construction of a fortified town was started at the site of the present-day town of Phra Pradaeng in Samut Prakan Province.

During the Second Reign, King Buddha Loet La Nabhalai (Rama II) [1809-1824] gave high priority to securing the coast against any invasion from the sea. By 1814, construction of the first fortress was underway, after work on establishing a fortified town had been resumed. Called Pu Chao Saming Phrai, it was located in the perimeter of the town named Nakhon Khuean Khan, the present-day Phra Pradaeng Town. By royal command, 300 Mon men were moved from upstream settlements in present-day Pathum Thani Province to settle down with their families. Soon after, the fortress named Phlaeng Fai Fa was built.
Order for the construction of yet another fort on a river island was given in 1824. Between fortresses on the east and west banks of the Chao Phraya River, a chain was running, put up to prevent ships from proceeding upstream.

During the Third Reign, that of King Nang Klao Chao Yuhua (Rama III) [1824-1851], fortification works at two river mouths were carried on. By the year 1828, construction of an island fort as part of the Phi Suea Samut Fortress was completed. That island fort became known as Phra Chedi Klang Nam, nowadays situated on the western river bank, in Samut Prakan Province. Another fort was built at the mouth of the Tha Chin River, known variably as Suphan Buri River or Nakhon Chai Si River as well, at a location in present-day Samut Sakon Province. Named Vichian Chodok, it lies in ruins, as of now.

In the process of reconstruction, historic sites laid to ruin by enemies were used as sources of building material. An early and eminent example is the construction, by royal command, of the monastery named Wat Chaloem Phra Kiat. It was built using bricks from a demolished fortress at the mouth of Khlong Om, a branch of the Chao Phraya River, on the latter’s west bank in present-day Nonthaburi Province, in 1847. Its exceptionally beautiful chapel has mural paintings, and splendid sculptures on pediments as well as door and window frames. Attractive are the decorations made from colourful Chinese ceramics.

At close distance, nowadays in neighbouring Nakhon Pathom Province, on the bank of the downstream section of the Nakhon Chai Si River, the monastery named Wat Rai Khing was built by royal command, in 1851. It is famous for its Buddha statue known as Luang Pho Wat Rai Khing, whose torso in the Chiang Saen style was fitted with a head in the Rattanakosin style. The torso had been salvaged from the ruin of its former abode in Ayutthaya.

By royal command, the precinct of the monastery named Wat Ku in Nonthaburi Province was chosen as the site for the construction of a building to commemorate the tragic drowning of Queen Sunantha Kumariraj, royal consort of King Rama V.

The only fort, called pom in Thai,
left of originally five built early in the 19th century at the mouth of the Chao Phraya River, named Phlaeng Fai Fa, was matched through the construction of the fort named Phra Chula Chomklao, during 1884 through 1893. It is located south of Phra Samut Chedi in the district of the same name in Samut Prakan Province.

As work progressed on the reconstruction of the world’s tallest pagoda known as Phra Pathom Chedi, its surroundings were settled and grew to the size of a town. Nearing the completion of buildings attached to the pagoda, Nakhon Pathom Town had come into existence.

**RIPARIAN WAY OF LIFE AND DOMESTIC MARKET ECONOMY**

Throughout history, until the end of the 19th century, both rivers and canals served several purposes simultaneously, including water supply for domestic consumption, watering livestock, rearing aquatic animals, crop irrigation, drainage of floodwater, waste disposal, and defence. Equally essential were transport and communication across the alluvial, marshy lands of the Lower Central Plain which had almost exclusively been waterborne. Ayutthaya as the capital city of Siam had been paraphrased as the “Venice of the East”, an eponym inherited by Bangkok.
Floating markets owe their existence to the foresight of King Chulalongkorn, Rama V (1868-1910), who had ordered the expansion of the canal network complete with water gates and sluices, thus connecting the Chao Phraya, Tha Chin or Nakhon Chai Si, and Mae Klong rivers, which has fostered trade across the provinces.

Regular boat services connect, to this day, locations throughout the Central Plain and beyond, as far west as Ratchaburi Town and as far east as Chachoengsao Town. Several such routes lead through the maze of narrow canals in what has been nicknamed the “Garden of Thailand”.

ROYALLY INITIATED INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

The plain formed by downstream river basins and their estuaries had been going through a metamorphosis that is characteristic of the start-up of modernization and development in Thailand. Historical settlements clustered along the Chao Phraya River, mostly on its west bank and in its immediate, undulating hinterland had been brought back to life. New settlements were established, often at abandoned historical sites. Toward the east of the Chao Phraya River, vast marshy lands had covered the plain up to the foothills of the mountain massif called Khao Yai, throughout earlier history. By royal command, around the turn from the 19th to the 20th century, the biggest land consolidation project ever was implemented by draining the marsh through a system of 14 parallel canals, called khlong in Thai, that run in north-south direction and, by natural gravity, feed the water into the main canal, Khlong Rangsit, which runs from east to west, in an almost straight line, and empties into the Chao Phraya River.

To improve communication and transportation required for major projects, more canals were constructed such as Khlong Maha Sawasdi and Khlong Chedi. Availing of this infrastructure, King Rama VI had the summer palace of Sanam Chand constructed, beginning in 1907, when still Crown Prince. Nowadays, the ensemble of elegant buildings houses municipal offices and a museum.

By royal command, the town of Nakhon Khuean Khan, established
as a fortification at the mouth of the Chao Phraya River, located in present-day Samut Prakan Province, during the First and Second Reigns, was renamed Phra Pradaeng, in the year 1915.

The transition during the recent six decades, coinciding with the Ninth Reign, the reign of King Bhumibol Adulyadej [Rama IX, since 1946], has taken Thailand from the status of an agrarian country to that of a newly industrializing state. Major challenges are the conservation of the natural environment, harnessing of natural resources, conservation of the built environment, preservation of ethnic diversity, and urbanization.

Royally Initiated Environmental Protection

The significance of the conservation of the natural environment is evident from the numerous assessments, activities, and installations throughout the Lower Central Plain. Examples chosen illustrate two facets. One example highlights a problem situation that is characteristic of wetlands under the impact of modernization. At Wat Phai Lom on the Chao Phraya River, in Pathum Thani Province, one of the very oldest monasteries dating from the Sukhothai Period, the well-known sanctuary for Indian open-billed storks seems doomed. Upstream dams have reduced water supply needed by the *dipterocarpus* trees in which the birds nest, and chemical fertilizers keep poisoning the apple snail, the storks’ primary source of feed. Like in other such instances, conservation action is expected to protect that bird sanctuary.

Another case has set an example of how a monastery takes a lead in recognizing current needs in a changing environment. Wat Sala Daeng Nuea, situated on the Chao Phraya River in Pathum Thani Province as well, is not solely known for its ancient edifices, including some Mon-style chedi, an ordination hall with a wooden pulpit, a neat ensemble of monk quarters, *kudi*, a library, and a water filtering installation of yore such as is hardly found anywhere else. Another unique feature is the daily chanting in the Mon language. For the exemplary cleanliness in its compound as well as in the surroundings of the local community, for protecting the envi-
Environment and safeguarding against polluting the Chao Phraya River, in 1998 the monastery was presented with an award by the Ministry of Public Health. Noteworthy as well is the upholding of tradition by the community through the ongoing construction of houses using a design that blends traditional Thai and Mon styles.

Among the natural resources, water has been of vital significance for the Lower Central Plain, both as the proverbial source of life and as a threat to life. Its harnessing, hence, has distinctive components, two of which are chosen as examples. In recent history, during the Fifth Reign, the harnessing of waters abundant in the vast marsh to the north of the capital city of Bangkok was accomplished through the huge drainage project that largely covers the present-day province of Pathum Thani. Its salutary effects include land consolidation, transportation, irrigation, aquaculture and, though to a limited extent, flood protection.

In the present Ninth Reign, H. M. the King devised the “Monkey Cheek Project” (known in Thai as the kaem ling project), in 1995, to regulate excess water. Flood control is effected in such a way that floodwaters are channelled to bypass the capital city of Bangkok in the east and west. In the west, floodwaters are directed towards flood retention basins, the said “monkey cheeks or kaem ling” in the marshy, largely uninhabitable coastal areas of Samut Sakhon Province and the southwestern part of the Bangkok Metropolitan Area. Whenever the sea water surges and floodwaters cannot be eliminated, they are retained in those “cheeks”. In the east, canals from Pathum Thani Province to the coast of Samut Prakan Province were deepened. Since the completion of the Pa Sak Jolasid Dam and the Upper Nakhon Nayok Watershed Development Project, both of which store water in reservoirs, the eastern flood protection scheme is effective.

These retention basins and the drainage canals also have the salutary impact of supporting mangrove restoration and conservation along the adjacent coast. Naturally and historically, with the flooding and ebbing tides there were mangrove forests in abundance throughout the brackish river estuaries. By nature, these forests are the habitat of many kinds of trees, in addition to
the great variety of mangroves, of aquatic and invertebrate animals, and of birds. For much of this wildlife, mangrove forests are the sole habitat where to nest, breed and hatch. Hence, the conservation of mangrove forests through royal initiative preserves the source of marine life as well, on which fisheries, livelihood, and food security depend.

**INTERFACING OF MODERNIZATION WITH PRESERVATION**

The vicinity of the central downstream river basins and estuaries to Bangkok, Thailand’s capital city since 1782, has triggered a sprawling urbanization into the surrounding area. As of the year 2005, the provinces of Samut Sakhon, Nakhon Pathom, Nonthaburi, Pathum Thani and Samut Prakan have become part of the Greater Bangkok Region. The provinces of Nonthaburi and Samut Prakan have been brought one step forward and are part of the Bangkok Metropolitan Area. This has particular relevance in terms of urban planning along the three national highways named Sukhumwit Road toward the east, Phahonyothin Road toward the north, and Phetkasem Road toward the west. Three urbanized and highly industrialized corridors have evolved.

Change and development are exemplified by the northern corridor, in the direction of and encompassing Ayutthaya Town, where an industrial zone along with a virtual academic hub have emerged. Following is an exemplary overview of the trend as evident in Pathum Thani Province.

The Royal Jubilee Agricultural Museum [*Phiphithaphan Kan Kaset Chaloem Phra Kiat*] is housed in altogether nine buildings. Thematic displays feature food production, farming activities, forestry, agricultural communities, and decorative flower cultivation. There also is an aquarium. Specialized facilities offer information about agriculture as well as natural resources, linked to training and seminar facilities. The royally initiated research centre covers agriculture, fisheries, forestry, mangrove conservation, and land development.

Built in celebration of H. M. the King’s 60th Birthday Anniversary, in the shape of dice, the National Science Museum [*Ongkan Phiphithaphan Withayasat Haeng Chat*] displays exhibits in sections dedicated to documents, models and specimens of
scientists’ work; fossil relics and evidence of early history of humankind within the borders of Thailand; cave shelters and wooden houses; indigenous ergology and technologies in the fields of geology, hydrology, housing, agricultural production, and construction; special displays of human ingenuity as well as everyday appliances; and examples of Thai indigenous knowledge.

Beginning in 1972, the province has become an academic hub, with an unparalleled concentration of institutions and organizations. They include the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), an international, autonomous postgraduate-level university, relocated there in 1972. As of the year 2005, others are, in alphabetical order, Bangkok University, East Asia University, Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi, Rangsit University, Shinawatra University, Sirindhorn International Institute of Technology, and Thammasat University.

Organizations engaged in research, notably research and development, demonstration and dissemination, human resource development, and policy research as well as strategic planning include the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center, the Technopolis with the Thailand Environment Research Center and the Asia – Europe Environmental Research and Training Center, the Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) Research & Development Institute and, a recent addition, Thailand’s Science Park.

Thailand’s first, privately developed industrial estate, Nava Nakhon, was established in the early 1970s. A sports complex meeting the requirements as venue of an international event was built for the 13th Asian Games. In the recent past, the Royal Thai Mint was relocated. It is housed in a building whose postmodern design blends Thai elements with functional requirements of an industrial complex, situated on a spacious ground.
In terms of physical geography, the Isan, the northeastern region, is also known as the Khorat Plateau. It is flanked, in the west, by the Phetchabun Mountain Range and the Phang Hoei Mountain Range, in the southwest by the San Kamphaeng Mountain Range, and in the south by the Dong Rak Mountain Range. Straddling the northeastern interior is the Phu Phan Mountain Range, which separates two wide basins of low-lying lands, the Khorat Basin in the southwest and the Sakon Nakhon Basin in the northeast.

High mountains in the west and south as well as the interior mountain range with the headwater areas of the Mun and Chi rivers as well as numerous minor tributaries of the Mekong River in the northwest and northeast define three river basins, namely, Mun River, Chi River, and Mekong minor tributary river basins, in descending order of magnitude.

The Khorat Basin encompasses two vast plains, one in its western
part called Thung Samrit and another in its eastern part named Thung Kula Rong Hai. These plains, called thung in Thai, serve as overflow areas during the rainy season. In the dry season, they are parched and bare of anything but coarse grass. Hence, they are large semi-arid expanses dotted with natural levees or ridges which are one to five metres higher than the surrounding area. While the plains are subject to regular inundation, the levees or ridges are not normally flooded. Above these levels are the alluvial and bedrock terraces. It is in these locations where the human habitat evolved throughout history. Similar are the physical conditions in the Songkhram River Basin with its seasonal marshes along the rivers [bung in the local Thai vernacular] and its low-lying wetlands [tham in the local Thai vernacular], both naturally grown with flood-plain forests.

As the bedrock of the Khorat Plateau, by which name geologists refer to the entire northeastern region, consists of cetaceous rocks such as sandstone, shale and siltstone, with considerable layers of rock salt and other salt-bearing strata, water supply has always been precarious. In short, Isan is sitting on one of the world’s largest rock salt stocks. It is for this reason that surface water collection has been vital. Reservoirs of small or medium sizes have been built and operated in elevated terrain, since historical times and until this day.

The heartland of Isan, Thailand’s northeastern region, is on elevated ground where fresh water is available and flooding does not normally occur. The natural environment on hills and mountains provides resources which supplement people’s productive activities and help to secure their livelihood. One of the natural resources, vegetation cover, especially forests, has been largely depleted in the course of history. Timber was in increasing demand for construction, including scaffolding in the process of erecting magnificent laterite and stone edifices as well as steadying structures not built of laterite or stone. Lumber and crooked wood, or knee-wood, was needed as fuel-wood, the sole source of energy for all activities that required thermal processing, notably operating innumerable kilns.

Another natural resource, rock salt, was of vital importance for
survival, through direct intake by human beings and animals alike. Over the centuries, salt was the sole means for the preservation and storage of food stuff fit for human consumption. Salt was a vital necessity and valuable commodity. To sum up, the concurrent availability of forests in headwater areas, of game owing to rich wildlife, of reliable fresh water supply, of building materials such as timber, laterite, sandstone and clay, of alluvial soil in depressions suitable for crop cultivation, combined with flood protection and some measure of security in an elevated terrain made that area the preferred habitat. It covers the upland parts of the present provinces of Kalasin, Maha Sarakham, Roi Et, Sakon Nakhon and Yasothon, hence paraphrased the heartland of Isan.

PREHISTORY

The significance of living on higher ground is proven by evidence of life as long ago as when dinosaurs were roaming the uplands in the middle of the Khorat Plateau, in the area paraphrased the Heartland of Isan. In present-day Kalasin Province are three sites of big concentrations of dinosaur fossils and, indeed, some of the world’s major dinosaur fossil sites. They render evidence of two types, herbivorous and carnivorous dinosaurs, which lived between 265 and 130 million years ago. Most are fossils of sauropods, monsters with long necks and tails, which lived 150 - 130 million years ago. The remains of one particular sauropod render one of the most complete dinosaur skeletons ever found. Also, the skeleton of a carnivorous dinosaur of the Siamotyrannus isanensis species is considered one of the world’s greatest finds.

Similarly spectacular discoveries were made at the site of Mueang Fa Daet Song Yang, capital of an ancient realm of the Dvaravati Period, now located in Kalasin Province. There, excavations also yielded evidence of an earlier settlement in prehistoric times, especially artefacts made from fired clay and bronze. They suggest that the Bronze Age had begun in this area before anywhere else in the world. In 1987, people of Sakon Nakhon Province stalking game in the mountains named Phu Pha Yon discovered stone carvings at the sites of two
Bai Sema, Sculpted Sandstone Stela
caves. In front of the Phra Dan Raeng Cave, they found a 115 square metre-sized slab believed to have fallen off the cliff. Although damaged, the remains show images created by abrading and engraving. They are categorized as marks and symbols, geometric patterns, human body parts, animals including two fish, trees and boughs. Stone carvings found in a niche in the sandstone cliff at Pha Lai Cave are grouped as human beings, some lifelike, some semi-lifelike; animals, including a fish, dogs, a squirrel, buffaloes, cattle and frogs; geometric patterns; tools and utensils including a plough, a hoe and a fan; and two houses with a triangulated roof each. These stone carvings are deemed as of tremendous archaeological value. Some scholars surmise that these items of cave art are more than 3,500 years old, in all likelihood older than pre-historic symbolic images discovered in China and India. More of such prehistoric images were found at the Phak Nam Cave in the Phu Pha Lek and Huai Huat National Parks within Sakon Nakhon Province.

Further south, in Roi Et Province, at the Ban Dong Mueang Chok Archaeological Site, elevated by some five metres above its surroundings, water supply ditches and a rock salt pit as well as earthenware and pots containing human bone pieces indicate the existence of ancient communities. Their practice of a second burial suggests that this site was inhabited towards the end of prehistoric times, likely 2,500 years ago. As of now, salt is still extracted there for local consumption.

Ruins at the site of Dong Mueang Toei in the Kham Khuean Kaep District of Yasothorn Province indicate a whole sequence of cultural periods. The ruins show traces of a city that was originally built as a stronghold of the Chenla Empire, as early as in the 5th century. Named Sangkha Pura, it was laid out 450 metres wide and 650 metres long, surrounded by moats. Preserved are foundations of a palace and a Hindu sanctuary dedicated to the deity Shiva built of bricks, stone axes, and utensils.

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1 All historical data, i.e. years and centuries, refer to the chronology of the Western Calendar.
MONUMENTS AND ARTEFACTS TRACED TO THE 6TH UNTIL 11TH CENTURIES: EXAMPLES OF THE DVARAVATI CULTURE

Indications are strong that the centre of power and culture in the heartland of Isan during the Dvaravati Period was the city known as Mueang Fa Daet Song Yang. Its ancient site, near the modern town of Kalasin, flourished during the 9th to 11th centuries. Within and around its perimeter which covers an area of 2.7 square kilometres and is laid out like a heart-shaped bai sema or stela, ruins exist and traces have been found of 14 religious structures. Owing to the large number of bai sema, artistically carved stelae, out of which more than 130 pieces are preserved, together with precious Buddha images, at the Khon Kaen National Museum, the ancient city of Mueang Fa Daet Song Yang is recognized as the largest and most important site of bai sema in the northeastern region of Thailand.

In the centre of this capital of a Dvaravati realm is the modest edifice of a monastery, Wat Pho Chai Semaram, which is surrounded by ancient sandstone stelae, bai sema, some of which are decorated with bas-relief. The finest was discovered in 1974. Its bas-relief shows a king and queen adoring the Buddha. The sheer number of stelae remaining in situ points to the wealth of artefacts coming from this ancient city surrounded by two rows of moats.

The most complete ruin, also the tallest edifice of Mueang Fa Daet Song Yang, situated on a nearby hill, is Phra That Yakhu, a brick chedi, one of originally four pagodas built in the Dvaravati Period on the hills called Non Fa Yat and Non Fa Daet. Of the original pagoda only the star-shaped base decorated with some remaining traces of stucco has been preserved unchanged. During the Ayutthaya Period, an octagonal chedi was built on the original base, and during the Rattanakosin Period the top was raised.

2 The bai sema is a stela, a sculpted stone slab shaped like a leaf. Just like leaves vary in shape, so do the neatly carved stelae. These bai sema are placed at the four corners and at the four points where the two central axes of any ordination hall, known as ubosot in Thai, intersect the alignment of the corner points. The bai sema demarcate the sacrosanct ground surrounding the ubosot inside any Buddhist monastery.
It has been surmised that the indigenous population were Lawa, an ethnic group whose language belongs to the Mon-Khmer branch of Austro-Asiatic languages. Their settlements were located alongside the Lam Pao River. There, a small Buddha image carved from laterite was found which is now housed in Wat Klang. However, the name of the town and province, Kalasin, is Sanskrit in origin and translates as “black water”, a composite of “kala” meaning black and “sinthu” meaning water.

Historical monuments of the Dvaravati Period in Kalasin Province include the Phra Phutta Saiyat Phu Khao, a reclining Buddha image in the form of a bas-relief sculpted on a cliff. This image is believed to have been created about 2,000 years ago. It features the Buddha lying on the left instead of on the right side. Phuttha Sathan Phu Po is a religious site with two reclining Buddha
images, with the larger one of the Dvaravati Period. This bas-relief image was sculpted on the cliff during the 7th to 8th centuries. It was complemented by an Ayutthaya-style bas relief. Sheltered by an overhang in the cliff, both were gilded in the course of time. At close distance, another bas-relief of a reclining Buddha in the Dvaravati style, called Phra Phuttharup Choen Po, has likewise been gilded over during centuries of worshipping.

The monastery named Wat Si Bun Rueang, locally known as Wat Nuea, has kept some bai sema, originally from the ancient Dvaravati capital city of Mueang Fa Daet Song Yang. Most beautiful is the one depicting an angel flying above a castle, and a king and his family portrayed in the lower part.

At the site of the ancient city named Nakhon Champa Si in Maha Sarakham Province, the remains of an oval-shaped plan with walls and moats indicate its Dvaravati origin and existence during the 6th to 7th centuries, before it became an outpost of the Khmer Empire. Beginning in 1979, rings and plates made from bronze, and terra-cotta Buddha images were excavated at the site of an ancient stupa known as Phra That Na Dun. The rear sides of these Buddha images bear inscriptions, one 11.2 by 13.8 and the other 4.2 by 3.8 centimetres, both written in Pallawa letters used in the 6th to 7th centuries. Soon, villagers brought many more items such as stupa fragments and a compact containing relics of the Buddha. Eventually all led to the reconstruction of the religious edifice and its consecration in 1987.
Considered the most important Buddha images in the Dvaravati style and sculpted of red sandstone are the ones named Yuen Mongkhon and Ming Mueang. Legend has it that the Yuen Mongkhon Buddha image was created by local women-folk, and that the Ming Mueang Buddha image, also known as Suwan Mali, is the work of local men-folk. Both images were sculpted in the belief that they will ensure rainfall when it is due.

The monastery named Wat Nuea in Mueang District of neighbouring Roi Et Province is assumed to have been built early in the Dvaravati Period, when people began to embrace and profess their faith in Buddhism. Located in the town named Saket Nakhon, by then the capital city of the Ku Lun Tha Kingdom, its significant architectural features are stupas built of bricks and shaped like a lotus bud as well as stelae, bai sema, inscribed using Pallawa letters.

The monastery named Wat Phra That Choeng Chum in Sakon Nakhon Town was built on the site of an older sanctuary. This is evident from some ancient bai sema and archaeological remains of the Dvaravati Period.

At the ancient site named Dong Mueang Toei in Yasothon Province, inscriptions in Pallawa letters and Sanskrit language, remains of religious buildings, a pond and remnants of a city wall are evidence of a thriving community in the Dvaravati Period during the 7th to 8th centuries. Four rectangular stone inscriptions contain fragments of a long, detailed text. This has inspired the search for likely several pieces still missing.

Although the origins of Ku Chan, located at Ku Ban Ngiao in Kham Khuean Kaeo District of Yasothon Province, are still unclear, its sandstone and laterite remnants suggest that it flourished in the Dvaravati Period. Remnants of an ancient structure, likely the foundation of a sanctuary which housed a major Buddha image, are stacked up in a three-metre high pile. The relics of the Buddha image include a five-metre square base and fragments that belong to a 15-metre tall statue. This ruin is surrounded by eight bai sema made of red sandstone. There also are a one-metre high, octagonal sandstone pole and a pond. Pieces of pottery across the site indicate a rich
tradition. At a distance of some 500 metres, there is a mound with eight *bai sema*, some made of sandstone, some of laterite. This mound was registered as a national treasure in 1948.

**MONUMENTS AND ARTEFACTS TRACED TO THE 11th UNTIL 13th CENTURIES: EXAMPLES OF THE KHMER STYLE**

The ancient Dvaravati City of Nakhon Champa Si, located in Maha Sarakham Province, continued to exist during the period when it became part of the Khmer Empire, as evident from several Khmer-style remains of structures built during the 11th to 13th centuries. Examples are Ku Noi, Ku Santarat and Ku Maha That, also known as Prang Ku Ban Khwao. All that remains of Ku Noi are a half-ruined tower, *prang*, on a laterite terrace together with the foundations of two *gopura*, high and ornate, covered gateways, and a laterite surrounding wall. Ku Santarat is a Bayon-style stone sanctuary built in the reign of King Jayavarman VII. Its front doorway, *gopura*, has a remarkably beautiful lintel. The edifice is in the middle of a square courtyard surrounded by laterite walls. The site of Ku Maha That, also known as Prang Ku Ban Khwao, dates from the 13th century. The stupa is built of laterite and shaped like a square pavilion, five metres long and eight metres high. The door pillars and lintels of its gateway are made of sandstone. Inside the stupa are two clay Buddha images.

Remnants of two sandstone statues, believed to be Buddha statues, were found in the courtyard which is surrounded by a laterite wall.

Important historical monuments of Roi Et Province date from the Khom Period, the time when the area was part of the ancient Khmer Empire, as evident from remains at numerous sites such as Ku Ka Sing, Ku Phra Ko Na and Prang Ku. The

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3 The Bayon style is a synthesis of preceding styles (i.e. Kulen, Preah Ko, Bakheng, Koh Ker, Preah Rup, Banteay Srei, Klearang, Baphuon, and Angkor Wat). It is characterized in the Buddhist temples of the late 12th and early 13th centuries. The temples are of complex architectural layout constructed at ground level and auxiliary structures including interconnected galleries and rooms. The sculpture of the Bayon style is best exemplified in the image of the Avalokiteshvara, which is identified by a small seated Buddha at the base of the crown. (Dawn Rooney, *Angkor. An introduction to the temples*. Hong Kong: Odyssey, 1999, p. 109)
Ku Ka Sing Sanctuary in Kaset Wisai District, situated in the compound of the monastery named Wat Burapha Ku Ka Sing, is the largest and most complete site of Khmer architecture in Roi Et Province. This sanctuary in the Baphuon\textsuperscript{4} style was built of laterite and sandstone, in the 11\textsuperscript{th} century. There are three towers, \textit{prang}, in a straight north-to-south line on a sandstone base and facing east. Each tower has three gateways. The pedestal of each tower is made of sandstone, which is expertly engraved in various exquisite patterns such as water lily petals and flame-like double-curved decorative designs. Also in the courtyard are a ruined, square shaped edifice and a sculpture of Shiva, which is evidence of the importance of this ancient site as a sanctuary of the Hindu deity. Many of the Hindu statues and lintels are kept in the provincial museum. The sanctuary is encircled by a laterite wall with four sandstone gates and a moat. The entire ensemble was restored and is well preserved.

Ku Phra Ko Na is a Khmer site with three brick pagodas on a single base, surrounded by a wall and gateways, all built of sandstone in the Baphuon style during the 11\textsuperscript{th} century. There is a gap of a missing lintel as well as traces of a Naga bridge and covered walkway leading to the outside pond, or \textit{barai} in Khmer language, nearby. The lintel was removed to an unknown destination.

The site of Prang Ku, also known as Prasat Nong Ku, is an example of an ancient hospital and infirmary built in the 13\textsuperscript{th} century and characteristic of the Khmer Empire since the reign of King Jayavarman VII (1181-1220). Although referred to as “hospital” in the literature, such centres served as infirmary as well. The ruins of Prang Ku comprise of its main tower, gateway, wall, and pond outside the wall. The artefacts displayed on-site include a sandstone lintel that was once above the doorway of the main tower, door colonettes and the lotus-shaped finial of the tower. As stated in an inscription, it was one

\textsuperscript{4} When the Baphuon style (referred to as Ba Puan in Thai) was developed in the middle of the 11\textsuperscript{th} century, temples had reached gigantic proportions. Continuous vaulted and columned galleries, which were constructed off tiered platforms, were common features. The sculpture of the Baphuon style is very distinctive as it was even more naturalistic than previous styles. (loc.cit.)
of a group of buildings called *arokhayasala*, hospital and infirmary ward.\(^5\)

Based on archaeological evidence, it is surmised that the first town at the site of the present Sakhon Nakhon Town was founded as an outpost of the Khmer Empire, in the 11\(^{th}\) century. In present Sakon Nakhon Town, the existing monastery named Wat Phra That Choeng Chum was built on the site of an older sanctuary, given some ancient bai sema, remains of chapels, and stone inscriptions. Archaeologists concluded that this area was once under the control of Khmer rulers. Core evidence is an 11\(^{th}\) century Khmer tower encased in the existing, tall pagoda, *chedi*, and disclosed through its three doorways to the north, south and west. One stone inscription, 49 by 52 centimetres, now attached to the door frame of the corridor leading to the back of the *vihara* carries a text in the ancient Khom script, dating from the 11\(^{th}\) century.

Another example of a stupa built in the Khmer Period eventually encased in a *chedi* is Phra That Si Mongkhon, also in Sakon Nakhon Province. Its base and the original stupa built from laterite are in ruins.

Of the originally three brick Khmer towers on a single laterite base only one stands today, known as Phra That Dum. This site in Sakon Nakhon Province dates from the 11\(^{th}\) century. Of the two dilapidated towers, only their laterite foundations remain. The partially collapsed brick tower, *prang*, has a pink sandstone lintel and remains of a sculpture of the deity Narai Banthomsin in the Baphuon style.

A stela at the monument of Ta Prohm Kel (located between Angkor Wat and Angkor Thom) relates that King Jayavarman VII issued a decree to build hospitals all over his kingdom and that these hospitals be accompanied by temples. Altogether 104 such temples with wards were constructed. Inscriptions indicate that they were placed under the protection of Buddha, the “Master of Remedies”. (Jean Laur, *Angkor. An illustrated guide to the monuments*. Paris: Flammarion, 2002, p. 300)
A legendary polarisation in gender and topographical perspectives led to the creation of two magnificent edifices in the Khmer Period. The contestants were a group of women building a Hindu sanctuary in the lowland near Nong Han Lake and a group of men competing by building another Hindu sanctuary on a nearby mountain top, both located in Sakon Nakhon Province.

Construction of Phra That Narai Cheng Weng Sanctuary, also known by the name of Wat Phra That Na Weng, was purportedly completed by the women’s group, and on schedule at that, some time in the 11th century. It is a sandstone pagoda on a laterite base, with ornate designs adorning its doorway, windows and excellent lintels. Its entrance has a fine lintel carved with an image of Shiva dancing. Only the northern side still has its lintel in position, showing Krishna struggling with mythical lions, surmounted by a reclining Vishnu. This fine Khmer monument is built in the Baphuon style.

On a mountain top, accessible by ascending 491 steps in a steep slope and now part of the Phu Phan National Park, stands the ruin of Phra That Phu Phek. It is apparently unfinished, as evident from the lack of any roof or finial as well as the absence of any decoration on the huge sandstone tower, prang, rising almost eight metres from a longish laterite terrace in the Hindu sanctuary, accessible by three stairways. Having lost sight of the star called Phek, whose position determined the duration of the competition between the groups of women and men, the latter gave up. One might guess that the men felt discouraged when observing the rapid progress in the women’s construction work down below and their splendid accomplishment.

Surmised to have been built at the same time as Phra That Phu Phek is the Khmer sanctuary of Prasat Ban Phan Na. It is a single edifice on a square base built of laterite. Nearby is the requisite pond of rectangular shape, with a decorated curb and steps built of laterite. To this day, the pond stores water all year round. The entire ancient site is in good condition.

The ancient bridge named Saphan Khom, also known as Saphan Hin, is evidence of the ancient road network put in place throughout the Khmer
Empire to connect its far-flung outposts. This road bridge crosses a depression that would be seasonally flooded. It was built of laterite to the northeast of Sakon Nakhon Town, now in its fringe. Situated at kilometre marker 161, in due course of modernizing the National Highway No. 22 it was dismantled and, then, reconstructed nearby.

Near the historical town of Mueang Sing Tha, modern-day Yasothon Town, is the ancient site named Dong Mueang Toei, which was successively part of the Chenla Empire, first, and of a Dvaravati realm, thereafter. Owing to its strategic location in elevated terrain not far from the confluence of the Chi and Mun Rivers, it eventually became part of the Khmer Empire. It was a Hindu sanctuary, as evident from Khmer artefacts such as a stone inscription, all preserved in the museum of the nearby monastery named Wat Song Pueai.

Examples of other such Khmer remains in Yasothon Province are the Nonsang Inscription, which relates a religious text written in ancient Khmer characters and engraved on a red sandstone bai sema, and the Ban Tat Thong Inscription, preserving an ancient Khmer text, in almost perfect condition. Moreover, three edifices remind one of the history of Khmer rule. They are Ku Chan, also known as Ku Ban Ngio, where two sandstone structures remain, built on a laterite square base; the Phra That Kong Khao Noi, a brick pagoda, chedi, covered with stucco; and Phra That Ban That near Nong Ing. They were constructed in the 12th century.

**Monuments and Artefacts Traced to the 14th until 18th Centuries: Examples of the Lan Chang Style**

In history, large rivers, especially their navigable sections, served as communication and transportation thoroughfares. Crossing rivers by boat connected settlements and their inhabitants infinitely easier and faster than covering distances overland. In short, mobility was facilitated using rafts, boats and ferries. With a view to the riparian regions of the Mekong River, the mighty stream connected rather than separated the riverside areas and their hinterlands. This explains the exchanges across and along the Mekong River, throughout history.
Although not part of the riparian area, the heartland of Isan was exposed all the same to the impacts of movements on and across the Mekong River. It is in this vein that various principalities with Lao rulers and Lao population, a subgroup of the larger ethnic group of the Thai, were in contact with the heartland of Isan and, at times, had a presence even in terms of ruling certain territories. The prominent part was played by rulers of Lan Chang.

Inscriptions in Maha Sarakham Province relate such historical events. The Moratan Si Ratchapati Woraman Inscription tells the story of a king named Phra Kamaratengan Si Chai Woramathewa who ordered his minister to lead an army detachment and come to the ruler’s relief. This inscription is kept at the Khon Kaen National Museum. Partly hidden by a Buddha image in the vihara of Wat Mahaphon in the same province is the Wat Mahaphon Inscription. Though deteriorated, it relates the story of the construction of Phatta Sima Town by the ruler, his relations and the local people.

The site of Roi Et Town, abandoned upon the demise of the Khmer Empire, was resettled by a Lao prince of Champasak. Named Saket Nakhon, the town was rebuilt and its wall fitted with eleven gates. It is this distinctive feature by which it became known as the town with 10 plus 1 gates, 101 in writing and pronounced roi et.

In similar fashion, the site of Sakon Nakhon Town, abandoned after a severe drought, was resettled and renamed Chiang Mai Nong Han, also known as Mueang Nong Han Luang. In present Sakon Nakhon Town, the existing monastery named Wat Phra That Choeng Chum, in the belief of the faithful highly revered as the site which the Lord Buddha visited to bless the townspeople, as proven by four footprints of the Lord Buddha of four incarnations, and venerated as a source of civilization for thousands of years, was built on the site of an older sanctuary. The Lan Chang-style, 24-metre tall chedi named Phra That Choeng Chum was built on the remains of an old stupa. The chedi has a square base and three indented tiers, with a tapering finial decorated with square-shaped lotuses and a gilded parasol at the top. The three entrances to the north, south and west disclose the old stupa inside; on each door arch stands a
Buddha image in the Lan Na style.

The existing chedi named Phra That Si Mongkhon was built upon an older square base with a stupa built of laterite. The square-shaped chedi is built of brick, covered with stucco, decorated with ceramics, and topped with a restored finial.

It has remained inconclusive whether the chedi named Wat Thung Sawang Chaiyaphum was constructed to commemorate victory, or whether it is a renovated Chenla Period structure. The foundation of the chedi resembles the style in which strongholds of the Chenla Empire were built. The top of the chedi, however, is built in the Lan Chang style.

In the south of Yasothon Province, there in the Chi River Basin, footprints of Lord Buddha were found in white sandstone outcrops. At these sites, the chedi named Phra Phuttha Bat Yasothon was built and a Buddha image in the posture beneath a canopy of Naga heads, Phra Nak Prok, was created, both built of laterite.
THAILAND: TRAITS and TREASURES

CONSOLIDATION OF THAI POLITY

The monastery named Wat Phuttha Nimit, also known as Phu Khao, located near the cliff in Kalasin Province on which the image of a reclining Buddha, Phra Phuttha Saiyat Phu Khao, was chiselled in the Dvaravati Period, is itself unique for its wooden chapel without side-walls, with its beautiful ornamental carvings and its ceiling with paintings relating stories of the last ten incarnations of the Buddha, known as sim in the Isan vernacular and called ubosot in Thai. In Kalasin Province as well, at the Buddhist sanctuary called Phuttha Sathan Phu Po, the smaller of the two reclining Buddha images carved in bas-relief onto a cliff was created early in the Ayutthaya Period. Like its elder pendant of the Dvaravati Period, it is gilded and sheltered by a cliff overhang.

The present edifice of Phra That Yakhu, also known as Phra That Yai and located in the perimeter of the ancient Mueang Fa Daet Song Yang, Kalasin Province, is the result of the restoration, in the Ayutthaya Period, of a stupa from the Dvaravati Period. In the process, it was transformed into an octagonal chedi. A Buddha image made of bronze, with an inscription in ancient Thai language at its base, is revered for its miraculous potency to make rain. It is housed at Wat Klang of Kalasin Town.

The chedi known as Phra That Yasothon, or else Phra That Anon, in the compound of Wat Maha That in Yasothon Town, in which relics of Phra Anon, one of the main disciples of the Lord Buddha, are enshrined, was restored in the Ayutthaya style. The compound of the monastery as adorned with bai sema, in the style of Si Sattana Khanahut or Lan Chang, present-day Vientiane, brought from there by refugees during the 1770’s.

At the site of the dilapidated town of Saket Nakhon, with its remnants of eleven gates, the present town was founded and named Roi Et, which at first glance might suggest “100+1” but actually refers to “10+1”, or eleven city gates, during the reign of King Tak Sin. In the province of the same name, there in Suwannaphum District, the central tower, prang, of the ancient Khmer sanctuary named Ku Phra Ko Na was renovated and, in the process, altered, in the year 1874.
The town of Mueang Sing Tha, whose origins are traced back to the Chenla Period, was renamed Mueang Yasothon, in 1814. This name is derived from the Sanskrit name of a Hindu deity, Yasothara, the “Preserver of Glory”, a son of Krishna, as related in the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*. In the monastery called Wat Maha That of Yasothon Town, the *chedi* named Phra That Yasothon, also known as Phra That Anon, was restored, once again, in the Rattanakosin style. As a result, this edifice blends Dvaravati, Khmer, Lan Chang, Ayutthaya and Rattanakosin stylistic features. In the reign of King Rama III, a Buddha image in the Chiang Saen style was installed. In the same province, there in the compound of the monastery named Wat Thung Sawang Chaiya-phum, a presumably ancient *chedi* was restored to commemorate victory by the forces of King Rama III over the enemy from Lan Chang, in 1825.

Early in the Rattanakosin Period, with the might of Siam in its ascendency, ruled from her new capital city of Bangkok, the Lao kingdom of Lan Chang lost control over the town of Chiang Mai Nong Han. Soon after, it was again captured by a ruler of Lan Chang and named Sakon Thawapi. When it was recaptured in 1827, during the reign of King Rama III, for failing to guard against the enemy, the town’s entire population was deported to Eastern Thailand, there to the area of Kabin Buri. In 1830, the revived town was named Mueang Sakon Nakhon. Its highly revered pagoda, *chedi*, known as Phra That Choeng Chum was adorned with a golden parasol at the top.

Further to the restoration of Phra That Yakhu, also known as Phra That Yai, in the Ayutthaya Period, its top was raised and its splendid finial was added during the Rattanakosin Period. As a result, this *chedi* built of brick has become the biggest and tallest edifice of the ancient Dvaravati capital of Mueang Fa Daet Song Yang in Kalasin Province.

The settlement of Ban Tha Rae is unique, in two aspects. It was founded as a community of Christians, mainly ethnic Annamites and Thai Yo, who felt oppressed while adhering to their faith. Granted permission to relocate in 1881, they opted for a site at the yonder shore of Nong Han Lake. There, a town was planned and its structure laid out
in a systematic manner, with roads, houses, public buildings and several churches. With construction in various architectural styles completed by 1884, the members of the Catholic community moved out of Sakon Nakhon Town and across the lake into Ban Tha Rae. Their regional centre is called The Mission of Tha Rae Nong Saeng.

Conservation of the Built Environment and Preservation of Artefacts

In contemporary Thailand, concerted efforts are made to conserve the built environment. Examples of exceptional magnitude and effect are the site of the ancient capital city named Mueang Fa Daet Song Yang in Kalasin Province. Included is the best preserved ruin of a brick pagoda, Phra That Yakh, also called Phra That Yai. Since 1936, the complex has been registered as an archaeological site. In the neighbouring province of Roi Et, the Ku Ka Sing Sanctuary is one of the largest and most complete sites of Khmer architecture. It was restored by experts of Thailand’s Fine Arts Department, so as to serve as a historical site rich in information about local history.

Throughout the heartland of Isan, numerous monasteries also are repositories of historical artefacts, documents, edifices, images, inscriptions, and statues. This concern is illustrated by three examples in Kalasin Province. The monastery named Wat Klang houses an ancient, small Buddha image carved from laterite in the folk style of the Lawa, inhabitants of the Lam Pao River Valley, in the distant past. In the compound of Wat Indra Prathan Phon is an ancient seated Buddha image sculpted in the Dvaravati style. Among some bai sema from the ancient Dvaravati capital of Fa Daet Song Yang, kept at Wat Si Bun Rueang, also known as Wat Nuea, is a most beautiful one showing a deity above a castle as well as a king and his family portrayed in the lower part. Other examples are the ancient stone inscription written in Khom letters in the monastery named Wat Phra That Choeng Chum of Sakon Nakhon Town, and the inscription with a historical account kept by Wat Mahaphon, a monastery in Maha Sarakham Province.
A great variety of treasured artefacts, found as well as excavated at historical sites such as those called up above, have been collected in museums for safe-keeping, preservation, display and study.

Museums at local level are often attached to monasteries. One example is Wat Pho Chai Semaram, a village monastery in Kalasin Province, whose grounds hold many sandstone bai sema, both sculpted and bare ones, which were retrieved from the site of the ancient brick pagoda named Phra That Yakhu, in the perimeter of the ancient capital of Mueang Fa Daet Song Yang. Another example is Wat Song Pueai in Yasothon Province which houses Khmer artefacts from the ancient city of Dong Mueang Toei. Provincial museums have built collections of objects which are germane to the respective history and cultural traditions. They include artefacts from ancient sites. An example is the collection of sandstone statues and lintels from the Ku Ka Sing Sanctuary, the largest and most complete site of Khmer architecture preserved by the provincial museum of Roi Et.

Precious and rare artefacts are part of the invaluable collection of the Khon Kaen National Museum. It is there where the first university in Isan was established. Documents, literature and information materials covering the history of the region contain frequent references to the Khon Kaen National Museum. It holds some 130 sandstone bai sema, of the "phim pha philap" [Yasodhara’s lament] kind, which are considered authentic, as well as numerous Buddha images, amulets and other objects made of fired clay and bronze from the ancient Dvaravati capital city of Mueang Fa Daet Song Yang and, therein, the compound of the chedi named Phra That Yakhu, in Kalasin Province.

Of equal significance are the holdings of the Khon Kaen National Museum which represent the magnificence of the ancient Dvaravati city of Nakhon Champa Si, located in Maha Sarakham Province. Triggered by random finds of ornaments such as rings and bangles as well as plates made of bronze and of terra-cotta Buddha images, and upon the start-up of archaeological excavations in the mostly ruined site, attention was focused on an ancient stupa called Phra That Na Dun and
its compound. As it became evident that this stupa was the most important edifice in which the holy relics of Lord Buddha had been enshrined, villagers requested that this Dvaravati stupa be restored. They came forward and assisted in the task by bringing more and more fragments, artefacts and, ultimately, a compact of bundled gold, silver and bronze caskets containing Buddha relics. Almost each and every part of the ancient edifice was thus salvaged. Most of the retrieved artefacts are now in the care of the Khon Kaen National Museum. Of particular significance are two terra-cotta Buddha images, the back of which bears inscriptions written in Pallawa letters, dating from the 8th to 9th centuries.

Restoration or reconstruction rather, of the stupa known as Phra That Na Dun was completed within few years. In 1987, H.R.H. Crown Prince Vajiralongkorn presided over the enshrinement of the Buddha’s relics into the reconstructed chedi and its consecration. Thereupon, the compound of Phra That Na Dun was officially designated as the “Buddha Monthon of Isan”. This “Land of Buddhism of the Northeast” at the site of the magnificent ancient city of Champa Si covers a landscaped area of 144 hectares, part of which is planted with trees to create a forest, and part of which is laid out as a medicinal herb garden.

Rather mundane, in comparison, is the dismantling of an ancient Khmer bridge in Sakon Nakhon Province, named Saphan Khom, or locally called Saphan Hin, and its reconstruction at a site near the original one.

**ROYAL RESIDENCE AND BUDDHIST SANCTUARIES**

To a much larger extent and higher intensity have new ventures been launched, modern infrastructure put in place, and buildings constructed whose significance reaches far beyond the five provinces subsumed as the “Heartland of Isan”.

In the Phu Phan Mountain Range, at short distance to the northwest of Sakon Nakhon Town, the Phu Phan Royal Palace was constructed, known in Thai as Phra Tamnak Phu Phan Ratchatiwet. There, the Royal Family would reside during the dry season. In the surrounding area, several Royal Projects are being
implemented, based on the findings of seminal research. They are geared to kindle and foster activities conducive to improving the livelihood of the local population. One such focus has been the revival of the traditional fabric weaving craft and artisanship. This venture has met with spectacular success, at local, regional, national and even international levels.

Among other ventures in mountain areas is the establishment of several Buddhist monasteries which have become recognized as retreats in several aspects. Their remoteness, natural surroundings, in some instances strenuous access, and rigour of monastic life create an environment focused on studies and meditation. An example is the monastery named Wat Pha Nam Thip Thep Prasit Wanaram in an area of 400 hectares, with its landmark, the Phra Maha Chedi Chai Mongkhon, situated on top of a big cliff called Pha Nam Yoi, also called Phuttha Utthayan Isan, in Roi Et.
Province. In the provincial capital, there in the monastery named Wat Nuea, the campus of the religious academic institution known in Thai as Maha Makut Ratcha Witthayalai, a university for monks, specializes in the teaching and studying of Buddhism in the Dvaravati Period.

Also in Roi Et Province, there in the monastery known as Wat Burapha Phiram or Wat Hua Ro, stands the tallest Buddha statue of Thailand. Named Phra Phuttha Ratchamongkhon Maha Muni, or Luang Pho Yai, for short, the statue was built of steel-reinforced concrete. The statue itself is 59.2 metres tall; the entire structure is 67.85 metres high.

**NATURAL RESOURCES AND PROTECTED AREAS**

As the shifting of the sites of regional centres throughout history indicates, natural resources have always been unevenly distributed. While the headwater areas and their immediate upland settlements appear to have sufficient water, seasonal drought is severe in large parts of the lowlands. The forest cover has been greatly reduced, and forests might have been depleted, unless this threat had been averted by the demarcation of numerous nature reserves in mountain areas. Rock salt reserves appear to be huge. They have by far not been depleted over thousands of years. Industrial salt production, however, has caused hazards to the vegetation cover, in general, and to farming, in particular, as well as to freshwater fishing and aquaculture.

Major attractions of the natural environment are cliffs, waterfalls, floodplain as well as wetland forests, and lakes. The big cliff named Pha Nam Yoi in Roi Et Province, part of the Pha Nam Yoi National Park, also known as Phuttha Utthayan Isan, is given as an example. It rises up to 200 metres above the ground, with water seeping all year round. Out of the many waterfalls, one in Kalasin Province is called up. Named Tat Sung Waterfall, its torrents tumble across large rocks and through pools into a very large, rocky basin at its bottom, the largest of its kind in Thailand. Rare flood plain forests still exist in the Songkhram River Basin. Two types are distinguished. The forest called *pa bung* in the Thai
vernacular of Isan grows in riverside land which turns into a marsh during the rainy season. Another type of forest, called *pa tham* in Isan, grows in low-lying areas with abundant water, in other words, in wetlands. These floodplain forests are the habitat of a rich diversity of rare, wild plant and animal species. The best known of the lakes and reservoirs, old and new, is Nong Han in Sakon Nakhon Province. It also is the largest freshwater lake in Thailand.

The physical and geographical conditions literally invite the establishment of nature reserves. Some are small, owing to a distinctive biotope and ecotope, and some are large to the extent that they straddle parts of two or more provinces.

Examples of the category of small-size nature reserves are the Lam Pao Forest Wildlife Conservation Centre, also known as Suan Sa-on covering an area of 227 hectares, in Kalasin Province; the Pa Dun Lampan Forest No-hunting Zone covering an area of 144 hectares, and the Kosamphi Forest Reserve covering an area of 20 hectares, both located in Maha Sarakham Province; and the Pha Nam Yoi Forest Reserve in Roi Et Province, covering an area of 160 hectares, which is part of the large Pha Nam Yoi National Park.

Five examples of the category of large-size nature reserves, which typically are called national parks, are briefly introduced hereunder. The Pha Nam Yoi National Park spreads across parts of Roi Et, Kalasin and Mukdahan provinces. Its area of 320 square kilometres is covered with mixed forest. The Phu Phan National Park with an area of 699 square kilometres covers parts of the three provinces of Sakon Nakhon, Nakhon Phanom and Kalasin, including a vast jungle. The Phu Pha Lek National Park straddles parts of Sakon Nakhon, Udon Thani and Kalasin provinces, totalling an area of 419 square kilometres. The Phu Pha Yon Chaloem Phrakiat National Park is the comparatively largest, with an area of 828 square kilometres across parts of Sakon Nakhon, Nakhon Phanom and Mukdahan provinces. The Phu Sa Dok Bua National Park encompasses pristine forest in the border area of the three provinces of Yasothon, Mukdahan and Amnat Charoen.

Few plant species of the natural
vegetation are summarized, relying on the selection of obviously important species named in official documents, in which they are singled out as facets of the distinctive setting of any province. Rattan is named as a plant which thrives in the floodplain forests of Sakon Nakhon Province, where some 50 varieties grow. Several are identified such as wai khom or wai khok used for stringing, wai bon or wai krabong suitable for furniture-making, wai hang nu and wai dong, both used for basket-making, and young shoots used for food preparation. As specialty of Maha Sarakham Province figures wild or bastard cardamom, called reo in Thai, which is valued for its essential oils containing fragrances such as borneol, camphor and linalool used to prepare herbal medicine. Thickets of assorted kinds of bamboo dot the nature reserves. The soil and climate are suitable for the growing of mulberry trees, on whose leaves the silkworms feed. This has literally spun off the burgeoning home-based silk producing, silk dying and silk weaving industries.

Forests are distinguished into several types. These are Dipterocarpus hardwood [ teng rang ] forest, virgin forest, virgin dry forest, dry mountain forest, and deciduous mixed forest. Forest trees identified are few. They include several trees of the Dipterocarpus genus, called yang in both Thai and English, Lagerstroemia spp. [ tabaek ], Rubiaceae spp. [ kratham ], ironwood, and wild almond [ Irvingia malayana (Simarubaceae) kabok ].

The samples of wildlife render, assembled and categorized, the following picture. There are monkeys such as langurs and large packs of golden gibbons. Other mammals include elephants, boars, civets, and hyenas. Of the species of ungulates there are rare red gaurs, barking deer, sambar deer, and mouse-deer or chevrotains. Siamese fireback, pea-fowl, and pheasants represent fowl. Among crustaceans is the rare crab species officially named pu thunkramom, in honour of H.R.H. Princess Chulabhorn.

**Ethnic Diversity and Indigenous Knowledge**

The present population of Isan has many roots. As highlighted in the descriptions of distinctive features of
the provinces of Kalasin, Maha Sarakham, Roi Et, Sakon Nakhon and Yasothon, one of the assets with regard to development is the rich diversity of cultural traditions. It is officially considered as of great significance for local manufacturing industries, particularly for the One Tambon One Product (OTOP) project, and for the promotion of tourism.

Examples of such cultural traditions kept alive are villages of the Lao. They migrated in large numbers late in the Ayutthaya and early in the Rattanakosin periods, mainly from Champasak in present-day southern Laos. Their descendants form the majority of the population of Yasothon Province, and those who moved onward settled all over Roi Et Province.

Thai Yo, originally from Yunan, settled during the reign of King Rama III in Sakon Nakhon and Yasothon provinces. Communities of descendants of Phu Thai, whose ancestors had fled their homeland to the east of the Mekong River, had migrated from areas in present-day Laos and Vietnam, or else had been taken captive in Laos and settled in Isan, exist in several provinces.

Some Phu Thai had come from Thaeng, now located in Vietnam, and settled in Kalasin Province such as the people who preserve their tradition at Mu Ban Watthanatham Phu Thai Khok Kong in Kut Wa Sub-district of Kuchinarai District, a venture initiated and promoted by the provincial administration as a tourist destination with home-stay accommodation.

Several Phu Thai communities in Sakon Nakhon Province trace their origin to hostages, known as Phu Thai Dam and Phu Thai Khao, taken captive upon the suppression of the rebellion by the Lao prince Chao Anuwong during the reign of King
Rama III. These settlers are scattered throughout the Phu Pan Mountain Range. Another group of Phu Thai migrated from present-day Laos in 1843, during the reign of King Rama IV. Some others are descendants of refugees from the left bank of the Mekong River who were granted refuge more than 100 years ago. The Phu Thai communities in Yasothon Province descend from inhabitants of the historic area known as Wiang Chan, the present-day Vientiane, captured after the victorious military campaign of King Rama III.

While by far most descendants of the ancient Khmer population became assimilated into the mainstream population, there still are some locations where especially their oral tradition is upheld through the medium of their mother tongue. One example are the Khmer who are concentrated in the Phlapphla River Basin, whose northern part belongs to Roi Et Province, facing the southern part in Surin Province.

The ethnic group whose members call themselves Kui, in some instances transliterated as Gui, and mostly referred to as Suai, originally hails from the Boloven Plateau in present-day southern Laos. The Kui, who speak a language that belongs to the Austro-Asiatic group of Mon-Khmer, are renowned for their skill in rounding up wild elephants and tame them. Their alternative, external name of Suai, which they deem derogatory, refers to the annual tribute, suai in Thai, which they were obliged to deliver to the Crown. Within the geographical area described here as “Heartland of Isan”, groups of Kui live in Maha Sarakham and Roi Et Provinces, there along some tributaries of the Mun River.

Among the ethnic groups hailing from areas across the Mekong River is that of the So or Kha So. People of this stock are concentrated in Kusuman District of Sakon Nakhon Province. The ancestors of some had migrated from Maha Chai Kaeo in present-day Laos, while those of others had been taken prisoners during the military campaigns successfully waged by King Rama III. In a local cultural centre, items of the So material culture are displayed and documents written in the So language preserved. As the need to have them translated into the Thai language proves, the language of the So differs substantially from
People of Chinese ethnic origin almost typically are descendants of immigrants who had established themselves in Nakhon Ratchasima during the Third to Fifth Reigns, 1824-1910, and had mainly engaged in trading. Members of those Chinese families, then, moved onward to settle in towns and markets throughout the “Heartland of Isan”.

As stated in a document published by the Office of the National Culture Commission, “all these ethnic groups are fully assimilated and consider themselves Thais.”

BUILDING PRODUCTIVE COMMUNITIES

Almost in the middle of Isan lies an expansive plain called Thung Kula Rong Hai. It is a harsh place to live in. While it is flooded during the rainy season, in much of this plain the water would quickly recede and completely evaporate, leaving the ground parched and scorched at the peak of the dry season. As an old folktale has it, wandering across this plain, thung in Thai, the people who make brooms and peddle them, kula, face hardship to the extent that they could not help crying, rong hai.

Its area size of 3.372 square kilometres exceeds that of Rhode Island (3,100 sq km) in the United States. It covers parts of the six provinces of Buri Ram, Maha Sarakham, Roi Et, Si Sa Ket, Surin and Yasothon. One third of the area is located in Roi Et Province alone. Together with its parts in Maha Sarakham and Yasothon provinces, the largest proportion of the Thung Kula Rong Hai, which equals the area size of the Grand-Duchy of Luxemburg (2.586 sq km), a European country, is part of the “Heartland of Isan”.

In the course of implementing development projects, a large portion of this vast plain has become not
only a productive area but also the land in which the unique Jasmine Rice, called *khao hom mali* in Thai, is grown. This rice variety is similar to the one known as *basmati*, its Hindu as well as Urdu name, which is grown in South Asia.

Like this highly valued agricultural produce, other local products as well have gained high appreciation. They are typically manufactured by cottage industries. Examples are those processing or producing wood, bamboo, clay, and yarn.

Under Royal Patronage of H.M. the Queen, local centres for the promotion of supplementary occupations were set up, called Sun Silapachip. Examples are the Sun Silapachip Ban Kut Na Kham in Charoen Sin District and the Sun Silapachip Ban Chan in Ban Muang District of Sakon Nakhon Province, where various crafts are upheld through skill training. H.M. the Queen has taken it upon herself to draw public attention to the cultural heritage of artisanship by promoting its products at national and international levels.

Working wood into utensils and decorative items is a skill for which villagers specializing in wood carving of Charoen Sin and Ban Muang districts in Sakon Nakhon Province are well known. The villages named Ban Na Samai and Ban Thung Nang Ok in Mueang District of Yasothon Province have artisans who create miniatures of animals and traditional houses as well as utensils from wood and bamboo. Using bamboo, the artisans at Ban Si Kaeo in Mueang District of Roi Et Province manufacture the wind instrument called *khaen*, one of the musical instruments characteristic of Isan. In the same province, there in Thawat Buri District, expert craftspeople...
manufacture the reed, a device on a loom resembling a comb and used to space warp yarn evenly, known as *fuem* in Thai. Home-based potteries in villages of Charoen Sin and Ban Muang districts of Sakon Nakhon Province are examples of a thriving local ceramics industry.

The best-known home-made product is renowned fabric which is woven in all five provinces of the “Heartland of Isan”. In many instances, the whole process of growing the raw material, spinning yarn, extracting dye, dyeing yarn, and weaving cloth takes place in one and the same location. Also, to an increasing extent local people took to the tailoring of ready-to-wear, *prêt-à-porter* dresses and accessories such as handbags. Two materials are commonly used, cotton and silk.

An example of upholding the indigenous knowledge required to extract natural resources for the production of dyes is set by the local experts at Ban Wa Mai in Akat Amnuai District of Sakon Nakhon Province. They make use of certain tree barks, leaves and blossoms to extract substances which are used as natural dyes for home-spun yarns.

Cotton fabrics are woven in villages and towns throughout the region, in far too many places as to list them here. Examples are the Sun Silapachip Ban Chan in Ban Muang District of Sakon Nakhon Province and the Sun Hatthakam Phu Thai Nong Hang in Kuchinarai District of Kalasin Province, as well as the villages named Ban Huai Luem, a project site of the Royal Thai Government’s One Tambon One Product (OTOP) project in Thung Khao Luang District of Roi Et Province, Ban Wa Mai in Akat Amnuai District of Sakon Nakhon Province, and Ban Si Than in Pa Tio District of Yasothon Province. In all these locations, cotton fabric is also tailored into ready-to-wear, *prêt-à-porter* garments, accessories such as handbags, or triangulated cushions, to name few end-of-the-line products.

Silk is the eminently prominent product of the area. Skills, techniques and designs are preserved in locations with population groups practicing traditional know-how. There, centres ensure continuity and further refinement. Leading examples are the Sun Silapachip Ban Kut Na Kham in Charoen Sin District and the Sun Silapachip Ban Chan in Ban Muang District, both
in Sakon Nakhon Province, as well as the Sun Hattakam Phu Thai Nong Hang in Kuchinarai District of Kalasin Province. Other locations where silk worms are reared, their cocoons processed, silk yarn spun and woven into fabric include Ban Wa Mai in Akat Amnuai District of Sakon Nakhon Province, Ban Phon in Kham Muang District of Kalasin Province, Tha Song Khon in Kosum Phisai District of Maha Sarakham Province, and Ban Wai Lum in Thawat Buri District as well as Ban Huai Luem, an OTOP project village, in Thung Khao Luang District of Roi Et Province. Ban Phon is famous for its phrae wa fabric with a woven design called mud mee that comes in fabulous variations of rhombic patterns also known as ikat. Traditionally, the so-called Thai Phuan patterns have featured hues of red only, created through the use of certain natural dyes. Nowadays, on demand yarn is dyed in all other colours as well. The weavers of Ban Wai Lum enjoy a fine reputation for the exquisite and colourful patterns of their silk fabric. In all these locations, home-based enterprises have expanded into the manufacturing of end-of-the-line products such as ready-to-wear, prêt-à-porter silk garments and accessories. Especially the mud mee silk fabric in splendid patterns and colours symbolises the fascinating diversity of all that which is the “Heartland of Isan”.

The western plateau is dotted with mountains and small plains which tend to be inundated toward the end of the rainy season, except for some levees or ridges. Above this level are the alluvial and bedrock terraces. It is in these locations where the human habitat evolved throughout history.

As the bedrock of the Khorat Plateau, by which name geologists refer to Isan, is sitting on one of the world’s largest rock salt stocks, surface water collection is vital. Reservoirs of small or medium sizes have been built and operated in elevated terrain. This has become a necessity due to the ongoing expansion of the frontier of human habitat and its corresponding activities, notably agriculture which still is the major source of livelihood.
Prehistory

There is strong and varied evidence of how conducive the western plateau has been for living organisms, since time immemorial, as well as for human habitat, which appears to be one of its earliest sites worldwide.

The concentration and variation of fossils of dinosaurs suggests that the physical conditions were favourable for the evolution of animal life, hundreds of millions of years ago. Beginning in 1986, geologists prospecting for uranium in a terrain shaped like a smokestack, a plain surrounded by mountains, incidentally discovered dinosaur fossils. This site lies in the southern range of the mountain called Phu Wiang, located in Phu Wiang District of Khon Kaen Province. The first such finding was the skeleton of a large herbivorous sauropod. It was also spectacular for the fact that three-quarters (75%) of all its bones were found, including thigh, leg, rib and spine bones. This rare specimen was classified as a gosaurus and recorded as Phuwianggosaurus Sirindhornae, in honour of H.R.H. Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn. At other spots, fossils of ten carnivorous dinosaurs were discovered. Another first was a fossil of a hitherto unknown dinosaur which was named Siamosaurus Suteethorni after the scholar who found it. Moreover, the oldest fossil found of a Tyrannosaur, 120-130 million years old, was named Siamotyrannus Isanensis. To protect the site and its surrounding area, the Phu Wiang National Park was set up in 1987. It covers an area of 380 square kilometres, straddling the districts of Phu Wiang, Si Chomphu and Chum Phae. To date, nine pits were excavated, yielding 68 footprints of the small carnivorous genus named Coelurosaurus, together with a large footprint of a carnasaur. On the rock plateau named Lat Chat, more than 50 footprints were made.

H.R.H. Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn made an official visit to the dinosaur excavation site at Wat Sakkawan, Sahatsakhan District, Kalasin on 24 November 1995.
fossils of many kinds of small predator dinosaurs, crocodiles and mollusc shells were found which are dated as of 140 to 150 million years ago. Of the Jurassic Period as well are the fossils at a site called ‘shell graveyard’ in Mueang District of Nong Bua Lam Phu Province. There, masses of petrified mollusc clad a 50-metre high cliff, with crocodile fossils nearby.

At close distance toward the northeast, not far from the shore of the Nam Phong Lake, are the Kut Kwang Soi and Ban Kut Kho Moei Prehistoric Sites, within the boundaries of Non Sang District in Nong Bua Lam Phu Province. In its far northwestern corner is another area of archaeological significance, named the Phu Pha Y a Prehistoric Site, which lies within the province’s Suwannakhuha District. These sites have deposits of petrified wood, namely, silicified, agatized, as well as opalized woods, and wood-stone. Near the provincial capital of Nong Bua Lam Phu, now within the perimeter of the Nam Tok Thao Tai Forest Reserve, are two sites known as Susan Hoi Lan Pi, the “graveyard or cemetery of shells which are millions of years old”. There, stuck on a steep cliff, fossilized shells from the Jurassic Period, about 140 to 150 million years ago, indicate that the area had been part of an ocean. Fossilized mollusc shells of various sizes were found, some as heavy as half a kilogram. In the surroundings with soils consisting mostly of slate, sandstone and gravel, fossils of crocodiles were found.

Evidence of human habitat some 30,000 years ago was found at the Non Mueang Archaeological Site in Chum Phae District of Khon Kaen Province. Based on excavations at the site of 35 hectares, during 1982 to1983, three significant periods are distinguished, including the Late Prehistory, the period of Dvaravati realms and that of Khmer rule. Of the prehistoric period, complete skeletons were excavated, orderly buried with tools, utensils, earthen crockery of various types, colour-engraved and band-ceramic vessels, ornaments such as bangles and anklets, as well as beads made of colourful stones. Apart from whole-some artefacts, pottery fragments and shards with red designs, either engraved or with indented rope design, called band-ceramics, were found scattered all over the site, along with animal bones, mollusc
shells, colourful stone beads, and iron tools. There are strong indications that the prehistoric people practiced field cropping, and that the site remained inhabited until into the Khmer Period of the 11th to 12th centuries.¹

Many of the ubiquitous caves bear testimony to prehistoric habitats. Not only did they shelter their occupants but they also preserved their artistic manifestations. At the Phu Pha Ya Prehistoric Site in Suwannakhuha District of Nong Bua Lam Phu Province, notably two caves are renowned for their prehistoric coloured pictographs on rock walls. *Tham Lang*, ‘the lower cave’, has drawings in red colour on a 5-metre long wall, featuring geometric patterns, animals, and human hands. *Tham Bon*, ‘the upper cave’, has pictographs in red colour which are grouped. The square shaped tableaus feature distinct human figures and animals which resemble reptiles. The animal pictographs are large-size drawings. All of them are about 3,000 years old.

The cave named *Tham Lai Thaeng* stands out among numerous other caves in a forest reserve which reaches from the Phu Pha Man Range in Khon Kaen Province all the way to Phu Kradueng, the landmark mountain of Loei Province. A plane rock slab, two square metres in size, shows some 30 prehistoric pictographs which feature human figures and animals.

In the Mum Cave, an important site of the Phu Kao – Phu Phan Kham National Park in Non Sang District of Nong Bua Lam Phu Province, prehistoric pictographs on large sandstones are drawn in colour or engraved. They depict a variety of figures including fish, snakes and axes as well as geometric patterns.

Ten prehistoric sites in Udon Thani Province may serve as examples to illustrate how people were attracted by the mountains, hills and highland to make a particular site their

¹ All historical data, i.e. years and centuries, refer to the chronology of the Western Calendar.
homestead. In the Phra Siang Rock Shelter the upper-level rocks feature eight prehistoric paintings. Pictographs on the ceiling of the Nang Usa Rock Shelter feature large geometric designs. Paintings at Tham Wua, “Cattle Cave”, and Tham Khon, “People Cave”, rock shelters in the Phu Phra Bat Historical Park, covering an area of 192 hectares within Ban Phue District, show cattle and people. In “Cattle Cave”, the pictographs in red ochre show three bulls, and the drawings in black on the rock of “People Cave” show eight human figures which appear to be holding hands. Artefacts found in the caves include sandstone idols and stone axes. The surroundings of these two rocks forming a natural shelter are dotted with ‘giant cauldrons’ and outlandishly-shaped rocks, which seem to have been carved or inexplicably eroded. The peculiar shapes likely resulted from glacial movements, millions of years ago. The site seems to have been occupied from prehistoric times, 6,000 to 4,000 years ago.

Findings at the sites of the monasteries named Wat Ku Kaeo Rattanaram, also known as Wat Ku Kaeo Ban Chuet, and Wat Pa Phu Khao Thong give evidence of human habitat in prehistoric times. For example, findings at the latter...
monastery include pottery, images and tools made of bronze, weapons, and skeletons. Mueang Nong Han Noi, located in Prachaksinlapakhom District near the lake named Nong Han Kumphawapi, is a prehistoric site with traces of a once large community. It is part of the Ban Chiang World Cultural Heritage Site. Most prominent among the prehistoric sites is Ban Chiang located in Nong Han District.

Since 1957, villagers chanced upon an increasing number of pottery fragments with red-painted designs. While doing sociological field research, an American student named Steve Young took the initiative to get some pottery shards carbon-dated. The result indicated that the pottery had been made around 5600 years ago. Systematic excavations were started in 1972 at the monastery named Wat Pho Si Nai and at one villager’s homestead. They led to startling discoveries of human skeletons and ceramic ware, some dating back over 5,000 years. The site was obviously a burial ground, as evident from human skeletons. Finds include an exceptional quantity of pottery with spiral, volute and arabesque decorations, stone and glass beads, ornaments, tools, and animal bones. All archaeological evidence suggests that prehistoric people lived in the foothills at the Ban Chiang World Cultural Heritage Site.
confluence of two streams. They practiced field cropping and animal rearing. Their houses were of a rectangular plan and built on stilts. Some scholars assume that the findings at the Ban Chiang site predate those made earlier at sites in the Middle East and in China, which had so far been recognized as earliest evidence of the Bronze Age. The Ban Chiang findings certainly shed new light on both Southeast Asian history and the topographical origin of civilization.

Considered to be cultural property of outstanding universal value, the archaeological site of Ban Chiang, together with its surrounding area, was declared a World Heritage Site. It comprises three components. One is the Ban Chiang National Museum with a wealth of artefacts and displays explaining the ancient Ban
Chiang culture and technology. The complementary component is an open-air museum in the compound of the monastery named Wat Pho Si Nai where burial grounds were excavated. Another component of the Ban Chiang World Heritage Site is the prehistoric site of Mueang Nong Han Noi, located at close distance.

Also in Udon Thani Province, excavations of an oval earth mound, 200 by 150 metres and six metres above the surrounding ground, which is located at Non Khi Kling, were started in 1982. They yielded twelve human skeletons, four of them children. All of them were buried along with ceramic vessels and beads. Findings also include items made of iron as well as bronze and two pairs of golden earrings.

Some 70 kilometres away from Ban Chiang, as the crow flies, in southwestern direction, are the prehistoric sites of Ban Kut Kho Moi and Ban Kut Kwang Soi in Non Sang District of Nong Bua Lam Phu Province. There, some farmers chanced upon ancient objects and human skeletons, in 1993. Archaeological surveys and excavations yielded more items such as human skeletons, pottery including ceramic bowls, bangles made of bronze or stone, quartz beads, sandstone moulds used to cast bronze ax-blades, iron tools, and mortars of the kind most likely used to grind medication. All these artefacts date from one and the same period. Especially the numerous ceramic bowls are similar to the ones of the Ban Chiang Civilization.

Some exquisite prehistoric objects found at Ban Chiang are preserved and displayed at the Khon Kaen National Museum. They include pots of dark hues and pottery with a beige background decorated with volutes of dark red spirals. Moreover, the museum’s Ban Chiang collection holds many bronze artefacts, produced between 6,000 and 4,000 years ago.

The earliest historical monument on the western plateau of Isan, to date, was found in Khon Kaen Province. It is the Don Mueang Am Inscription on a limestone slab. Written in Pallawa letters and Sanskrit language, the inscription refers to King Chitrasen of the ancient Chenla Kingdom in the 7th century.
MONUMENTS AND ARTEFACTS
TRACED TO THE 7th UNTIL 12th CENTURIES:
EXAMPLES OF THE DVARAVATI CULTURE

Some of the prehistoric sites introduced above were inhabited as well in historic times. The earliest examples are religious monuments dating from the Dvaravati Period. This has become evident through excavations at the Non Mueang Archaeological Site and in the Phu Phra Bat Historical Park.

At the renowned prehistoric site of Non Mueang in Chum Phae District of Khon Kaen Province, excavations of an oval-shaped mound, conducted in the years 1982-1983, uncovered the remains of a Dvaravati city which flourished in the 8th to 11th centuries. On the area of 35 hectares, the city core was surrounded by an earthen embankment and a moat, with another embankment and moat running parallel at some distance. Inside this wider perimeter, there existed several settlements. Seven large excavation demonstration pits make this unique plan and its physical details visible. Numerous
stelae, bai sema\(^2\), speak of the size and importance of this ancient city. Its site remained inhabited until into the Khmer Period, during the 11\(^{th}\) to 12\(^{th}\) centuries. One of the Dvaravati bai sema, an exceptionally fine stela found on the ancient site, was used as the foundation stone of the Khon Kaen Municipal Hall.

The Phu Phra Bat Historical Park, located in Ban Phue District of Udon Thani Province, is known for its many rocks and boulders of peculiar shapes which resulted from glacial motion, millions of years ago, and dot its area of 192 hectares. Much more visible than the prehistoric traces are the many ancient buildings, mostly of the Dvaravati Period. It is obvious how rocks were used to create most of the ancient buildings and objects. In some instances, rocks were used in situ as components of buildings. In other instances rocks were shaped and decorated to form a stupa. Or else, rocks were chiselled into such shapes as a foot. Archaeological finds at the sites named Phra Phutthabat Lang Tao and Phra Phutthabat Bua Ban, also known as Phra Phutthabat Bua Bok, include religious buildings modified from rocks complete with sandstone bai sema, sculpted stelae, and sandstone Buddha images. An ancient Buddha Footprint in miniature, paraphrased “inside the Bot”, and a great many sandstone bai sema, both at Wat Phra Phutthabat Bua Ban, date from the Dvaravati Period. They are sculpted and engraved, featuring human figures as well as ornamental patterns.

Of similar origin is the site of Phu Phra, part of the white sandstone mountain range called Phu Laen Kha, in Mueang District of Chaiyaphum Province. The cliffs of Phu Phra are covered with engraved Buddha images. In a pile of vast sandstone blocks is one stone pole carved with seven Buddha images. Sheltered beneath a rock overhang is a seated Buddha statue in the posture of subduing Mara, called Phra Chao Toe.

At the site of the present pagoda named Phra That Nong Sam Muen,

\(^2\) The bai sema is a stela, a sculpted stone slab shaped like a leaf. Just like leaves vary in shape, so do the neatly carved stelae. These bai sema are placed at the four corners and at the four points where the two central axes of any ordination hall, known as ubosot in Thai, intersect the alignment of the corner points. The bai sema demarcate the sacrosanct ground surrounding the ubosot inside any Buddhist monastery.
located in Phu Khiao District of Chaiyaphum Province, was an ancient city of a Dvaravati realm that flourished during the 7th to 11th centuries. Traces of an earthen rampart as well as a moat and ruins of buildings remain. Many artefacts were discovered, especially *bai sema*, sandstone stelae. The monastery named Wat Kut Ngong in Mueang District of the same province is known for its marvellous ground with many *bai sema* of the Dvaravati Period. Most of the stelae are large stone slabs carved from monoliths. The front of many is engraved with ornaments. Few show beautifully sculpted images such as the Buddha seated beneath the Bo Tree, or banyan tree, and one shows a Bodhisatva standing in a lotus blossom. Some stelae bear an inscription on the rear side in Sanskrit language using Pallawa letters, dating from the 7th to 9th centuries and relating texts which convey the Buddha’s teaching. Also, reference is made to the year 1215 of the Buddhist Era which corresponds to the year 672. This ancient site is deemed to be one of the exceptional ensembles of Dvaravati *bai sema*, in the whole of Isan. Archaeological evidence indicates that there were several Buddhist monasteries, both inside and outside the ancient city perimeter. One of these stelae, *bai sema*, was relocated and consecrated as the City Pillar, *lak mueang* in Thai, of the Phu Khiao District Centre. Situated in the same district, there is an ancient sanctuary surrounded by a laterite wall. Its central laterite pagoda known as Prang Ku houses several Buddha images, including a seated stone Buddha image in meditation posture, dated as of the Dvaravati Period.

In Chaiyaphum Province as well, there in Khon Sawan District, the monastery named Wat Khon Sawan houses a large sandstone Buddha statue, Phra Phuttha Rup Yai. It is three metres tall and locally known as “Luang Pho Yai”. On the grounds are several large sandstone stelae, *bai sema*, engraved with Jataka episode pictorials and inscribed in Mon letters. More such stelae are scattered in the surroundings. The entire ensemble dates from the Dvaravati Period, created during the Dvaravati Period.
9th to 10th centuries.

At a site named after the monastery of Wat Maha That Chedi, locally known as Phra That Don Kaeo and located in Kumphawapi District of Udon Thani Province, the ancient stupa built in the Dvaravati Period, with a lower base sized 14 by 14 metres and 1.25 metre high and a second level base measuring 10 by 10 metres and 1.5 metre high, is encased by the present chedi that rises about 36 metres. It features a bas-relief around the base, surrounded by bai sema, stelae, and columns, all these dating from the 7th to 8th centuries.

Owing to the durability of sandstone, more ancient sites of the Dvaravati Period were identified particularly in Udon Thani Province, based on the discovery or excavation of sculpted sandstone stelae called bai sema. At the monastery named Wat Phra Phutthabat Bua Bok, research on a veritable sandstone bai sema site indicates that it was inhabited by a large community. Its inhabitants were skilled in creating numerous large and exquisite pieces of art of different sizes and carvings. Of a unique kind are carved stelae showing human images. In total, 31 such stelae were installed in eight positions.

On an earth mound without moat at the foot of Phu Phrabat Hill in Ban Phue District, the monastery named Wat Non Sila-at Wanaram is surrounded by 25 bai sema. These stelae depict stories of Lord Buddha’s past lives and human figures. The main stela is over three metres tall, and all others are between 1.5 and two metres high. Another oval mound without moat, called Ban Hin Tang, is dotted with altogether 37 bai sema sculpted from sandstone and decorated with carvings. Some are as tall as three metres. While some are still grouped indicating the location of a completely dilapidated Buddhist temple, others are scattered across the mound. The excavated sandstone Buddha images and bai sema suggest that the ancient town of Mueang Nong Han Noi was a large community. On account of prehistoric findings in surrounding mounds, this area is encompassed into the Ban Chiang World Heritage Site.

At close distance from Phu Phan toward the south, in Nong Wua So District, the edifice named Phra Phutthabat Bua Ban enshrines a
footprint of Lord Buddha. Its battle-
ments are carved in decorative
patterns of the Dvaravati Period. In
the Phra Siang Rock Shelter, renowned
for its prehistoric pictographs, 20
stone Buddha images created during
the Dvaravati Period are placed in
the niche between the upper and
lower rocks.

Fine pieces of the Dvaravati Art
are preserved and displayed in the
Khon Kaen National Museum. Most
of the pink sandstone stelae have
moulded bases. They originate from
the precinct of Phra That Yakhu in
Kalasin Province. One stela inside the
museum building has a very fine
bas-relief showing a scene from
the life of the Buddha. Most of these
stelae date from the 8th to 9th centuries.
Moreover, the museum holds a whole
series of stucco Dvaravati pieces
which had decorated the sanctuary of
Phra That Yakhu in Kalasin Province.
Other such precious artefacts
originate from the ancient Dvaravati
city named Nakhon Champa Si in
Maha Sarakham Province.

MONUMENTS AND ARTEFACTS TRACED
TO THE 11TH UNTIL 13TH CENTURIES :
EXAMPLES OF THE KHMER STYLE

Under the vigorous impact of
the expansion of the Khmer Empire,
the Dvaravati Period with its
highly creative though rather
small realms ended. In some
instances, the conquerors had
their landmarks built on earlier
foundations. Mostly, however,
new sites were chosen for the
characteristically grand physical
lay-out of Khmer sanctuaries and
strongholds.

The largest Khmer sanctuary
in the north of Isan is the Prasat
Pueai Noi, locally called Phra That
Ku Thong, situated in Pueai Noi
District of Khon Kaen Province.
Compared to such sanctuaries as
Phimai, Prasat Phanom Rung or
Mueang Tam, this sanctuary is a
smaller one, yet a particularly
beautiful one. Its architecture
is a blend of the Baphuon3 and

3 When the Baphuon style (referred to as Ba Puan in Thai) was fully developed in the
middle of the 11th century, temples had reached gigantic proportions. Continuous vaulted
and columned galleries, which were constructed off tiered platforms, were common fea-
tures. The sculpture of the Baphuon style is very distinctive as it was even more naturalistic
than previous styles. (Dawn Rooney, Angkor. An introduction to the temples. Hong Kong:
Odyssey, 1999, p. 109)
Angkor Wat styles, in Thai known as the Ba Puan and Nakhon Wat styles. Prasat Pueai Noi was constructed during the 11th and 12th centuries. The site is composed of three towers, prang, built of brick and sharing one laterite base, surrounded by rectangular structures called bannalai which served as library buildings. Each prang has a stone chapel complete with gateways called gopura in Sanskrit, or sum pratu in Thai, one facing east and the other west. Each chapel entrance is decorated with a lintel showing neatly sculpted religious themes. In total, 13 complete lintels were found which feature spectacular Khmer stone carvings. Also, a statue was erected of Narai Banthomsin. Inside the gateway, gopura, to the central prang a stone inscription written in ancient Khmer letters and language reveals that this sanctuary was a satsana banphot, built at an elevated site, dedicated to Brahma and affiliated with the Shiva tenet. The whole structure is surrounded by laterite walls and a moat in horse-shoe shape. Outside the moat is a pond. In 1935, this sanctuary was registered in the Government Gazette as an important historical site.

Several ancient sites in Chaiyaphum Province date from the Khmer Period. The outstanding example is the monument of one of the hospitals built on the order of King Jayavarman VII (1181-1220). In characteristic manner, this hospital or infirmary is placed inside a sanctuary, which was built along the route called ‘royal road’ that connected Angkor with Si Thep in present Phetchabun Province, Central Thailand, via Prasat Phanom Rung and Phimai. This outpost is named Prang Ku after its main edifice. It is situated in Mueang District. In its centre is the main sanctuary, a square

4 The Khmers’ artistic genius culminated in the Angkor Wat style of the first half of the 12th century. Encircling galleries, vaulted passages, elaborate porches leading to towers, grand staircases between terraces and an extensive gallery of bas-reliefs complemented the temple plan. Tower pinnacles in the form of a lotus bud are a distinctive silhouette. (loc.cit.)

5 A stela at the monument of Ta Prohm Kel (located between Angkor Wat and Angkor Thom) relates that King Jayavarman VII issued a decree to build hospitals all over his kingdom and that these hospitals be accompanied by temples. Altogether 104 such temples with wards were constructed. Inscriptions indicate that they were placed under the protection of Buddha, the “Master of Remedies”. (Jean Laur, Angkor, An illustrated guide to the monuments, Paris: Flammarion, 2002, p. 300)
prang of five-metre side length built on a platform, with the pavilion-like structure of the ward for the sick and disabled in front. The complex is surrounded by a wall. All these structures are built of laterite. Nearby to the northeast lies the well-preserved pond in amazingly perfect condition. The central tower, prang, houses several images. The stone Buddha statue in meditation posture from the Dvaravati Period was probably brought there from elsewhere. The statues of a four-handed Avalokitesvara and of Nang Pratya Paramita are characteristic of the Mahayana Buddhist Khmer Period. The standing Buddha statue in the rare posture with one hand on the heart was likely placed there after the collapse of the Khmer Empire, owing to its obvious Ayutthaya style. The gateways, gopura, inside the sanctuary are in ruins. Preserved, however, are components made of sandstone including door and window frames as well as columns and lintels on the northern and eastern sides. One lintel depicts the Buddha in meditation posture.

To the northeast of this ancient hospital or infirmary in the sanctuary of Prang Ku, at a distance of some 90 kilometres, as the crow flies, lies the small Khmer sanctuary named Ku Kaeo, in present Mueang District of Khon Kaen Province. As evident from its structure and inscriptions, it was a Mahayana Buddhist sanctuary built around the turn of the 13th century. In a Sanskrit inscription, the resolve of King Jayavarman VII is recorded to get sanctuaries built which encompass a hospital or infirmary, called arokhayasan, so as to propagate both the faith and to provide medical care for the sick and disabled. The ancient site has a main tower, prang, with statues of a Bodhisatva, Phra Narai Song Krut and Phrom Song Krabue, along with a library building, bannalay. All this is surrounded by a wall. Outside in northeastern direction is a pond, baray, built of laterite. These Buddhist sanctuaries complete with hospitals are two of altogether 104 such edifices built during the reign of King Jayavarman VII.
At the monastery named Wat Kut Yang, in Ban Khwao District of Chaiyaphum Province, are the remains of a Khmer sanctuary which was built in the Baphuon style during the 11th to 12th centuries. Known as Ku Daeng, the square and tall laterite structure with stairways on four sides is preserved, together with a Ganesh statue. Of its four gateways, gopura, the brick walls are dilapidated, and only the sandstone columns remain.

Other examples of remains of the Khmer Period in Chaiyaphum Province are sculptures and two inscriptions. At the present site of the chedi named Phra That Nong Sam Muen in Phu Khiao District, which must have been the centre of a city in the Dvaravati Period, as evident from some existing earthen ramparts and moats, Khmer-style structures, sculptures and artefacts were found. Of great importance is the Bayon-style statue of the Buddha seated under a canopy of Naga heads, Phra Nak Prok in Thai, built in the 13th century. The “Phu Khiao Inscription” in ancient Khmer letters is similar to the one preserved at the monastery named Wat Ku in Chatturat District.

In Non Sang District of Nong Bua Lam Phu Province, at the site called Non Wat Pa, remains of an ancient Khmer sanctuary were unearthed. Most important is a statue of the Buddha seated under a canopy of Naga heads, Phra Nak Prok in Thai, made of laterite in the ancient Khmer style.

Several prehistoric sites in Udon Thani Province were chosen, time and again, to establish religious or strategic centres. During the expansion of the Khmer Empire, the ancient site known as Mueang Nong Han Noi in Prachaksinlapakhom District, now part of the Ban Chiang World Heritage Site, was taken over from a Dvaravati realm. A Khmer tower, prang, has been preserved, albeit modified into a chedi during the Lan Chang Period.

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6 The Bayon style is a synthesis of preceding styles (i.e. Kulen, Preah Ko, Bakheng, Koh Ker, Pre Rup, Banteay Srei, Kleang, Baphuon, and Angkor Wat). It is characteristic of the Buddhist temples of the late 12th and early 13th centuries. The temples are of complex architectural layout constructed at ground level, with auxiliary structures including interconnected galleries and rooms. The sculpture of the Bayon style is best exemplified in the image of the Avalokiteshvara, which is identified by a small seated Buddha at the base of the crown. (Dawn Rooney, *Angkor. An introduction to the temples*, Hong Kong: Odyssey, 1999, p. 109)
manner, immigrants from areas to the east of the Mekong River, settled on prehistoric ground, modified existing Khmer structures into pagodas, *chedi* in Thai, of the Lan Chang architectural style. These ancient, adapted edifices grace the present monastery named Wat Ku Kaeo Rattanaram, also known as Wat Ku Kaeo Ban Chit, located in Ku Kaeo District. Among the numerous, dilapidated structures and unique objects in the Phu Phra Bat Historical Park, located in Ban Phue District, are some such of Khmer origin. They are among those which were created by making use of rocks and boulders scattered in the area. Enshrined at the foot of the Phu Phan, to the south and at close distance from the Phu Phra Bat Historical Park, is a footprint of the Buddha. The battlements of the *chedi* named Phra Phutthabat Bua Ban consist of some carved in the late Dvaravati and others done in an early Khmer art style.

The complex Non Mueang Archaeological Site, located in Chum Phae District of Khon Kaen Province, yielded significant evidence of three distinctive periods. Further to prehistoric findings and the artefacts from the Dvaravati Period, it also held remains of the period when the Khmer had established themselves on this site of 35 hectares. It served as one of their strongholds until in the 12th century. Fine examples of that period are preserved at the Khon Kaen National Museum. Though from neighbouring sites, on display are Khmer statues, including an exquisitely carved lintel of the 11th century representing Indra, from Ku Suan Taeng in Ban Mai Chaiyaphot District of Buri Ram Province, and a large armless Shiva of the 12th century, from Ku Noi in Na Dun District of Maha Sarakham Province.

**RISE OF BUDDHISM, LAN CHANG CULTURE, AND THAI POLITY FROM THE 13TH CENTURY ONWARD**

While some of the ancient sites introduced above were deserted, others were never really abandoned. Typically, successive inhabitants carried on modifying structures, in due course of repairing and rebuilding, as it were. Venerated Buddha images and statues continued to attract worshippers, even in sanctuaries which were no longer
intact. Most such ancient Buddha images had, indeed, triggered the construction of new monasteries in ancient compounds or nearby.

At Prang Ku in Mueang District of Chaiyaphum Province, the standing Buddha statue, created in the Ayutthaya style, and displaying the rare posture of holding a hand upon the heart, remains a local focus of worshipping. At a deserted site in Ban Phue District of Udon Thani Province a community of Lao immigrants resettled and built the monastery named Wat Phra Phutthabat Bua Ban. This is evident from the Lan Chang style reflected through wooden Buddha images and buildings. Moreover, some structures and objects of historic times in the surrounding Phu Phra Bat Historical Park show modifications of rocks to create an edifice such as a chedi or a religious image in the Lan Chang style.

Four Buddhist monasteries are chosen as examples of upholding the function of a religious centre. They are Wat Phra That Nong Sam Muen in Phu Khiao District of Chaiyaphum Province, Wat Si Khun Mueang, also known as Wat Nai, in Mueang and Wat Tham Suwannakhuha in Suwannakhuha districts of Nong Bua Lam Phu Province, as well as Wat Ku Kaeo in Prachaksinlapakhom District of Udon Thani Province.

Although the time of the founding of Wat Phra That Nong Sam Muen on the site of an ancient, large Dvaravati city is unknown, its architecture and artefacts show a blend of Lan Na, Lan Chang and Ayutthaya styles. Hence, it was presumably built during the 16th to 17th centuries, at the time when King Chaiyachettha ruled Lan Chang. Phra That Nong Sam Muen, the main chedi, stands on a 32-metre wide square base and rises to the height of 45 metres. It has twelve faces and enshrines ancient Buddha statues, some cast from bronze, some made of laterite. This chedi is considered to be one of the most complete and most beautiful chedi or pagodas, incorporating art features of the Lan Na, Lan Chang and Ayutthaya Periods.
Wat Si Khun Mueang, or Wat Nai, is situated within the old city walls. There is no evidence when it was built. Historical records show, however, that it was renovated in 1572, after King Chaiyachettha of Lan Chang had fled from Wiang Chan, the present Vientiane, upon the Burmese invasion and settled in Nong Sum Chang, now known as Nong Bua Lam Phu. The monastery encompasses an ancient structure, a large pond, and a historical monument, the statue of King Chaiyachettha housed in the chedi.

In the cave called Tham Suwan-nakhuha, a rock wall painting depicts King Chaiyachettha, the exiled ruler of Mueang Wiang Chan across the Mekong River. The nearby monastery named after the cave holds an inscription written in “Dharma Isan” letters. Further to its astrological content, the shape of an ogival merlon and its size appear to be unique. Shaped like a pointed arch, resembling the merlon or solid upper part of a crenellated battlement, the stone slab measures 135 by 70 centimetres.

When Lao immigrants from Lan Chang settled at the site of the deserted ancient town of Mueang Nong Han Noi, they modified the Khmer structures to build Wat Ku Kaeo. The Khmer prang, or towers, were built over to create as many chedi in the Lan Chang architectural style.

Structures founded in the Ayutthaya Period have become characteristic of the style in which innumerable buildings such as monasteries were designed and built. One such example is the monastery named Wat Chedi Phum in Nam Phong District of Khon Kaen Province. Although there is no historical record as to when its main chedi, Phra That Kham Kaen, had been built, it was presumably constructed in the same period as Phra That Si Song Rak in Dan Sai District of Loei Province. The latter was built during 1560 to 1563. The foundation of the Phra That was designed and built in the shape of two tiers of overturned lotus blossoms, with the upper tier receding. While this foundation with a side length of some eleven metres is curved, it supports the indented square cube resembling a throne topped with the part containing relics of the Buddha. The upper part with indented corners tapers toward the finial with a tiered...
umbrella. Phra That Kham Kaen is 19 metres high. It is the result of local craftsmen’s ingenuity and skills. Their accomplishment was recognized by getting the ensemble registered as a national historical site, in 1935.

At an ancient site in Mueang District of Nong Bua Lam Phu Province, where remnants of a city wall run the length of one kilometre, two Lao aristocrats and their followers took refuge and established Ban Si Khun Mueang, in 1759. A subterranean shelter in the monastery named Wat Si Khun houses some Buddha images in the Lan Chang style. Another group of Lao immigrants from Vientiane increased the population and led to the founding of the town named “Nong Bua Lam Phu Nakhon Khuean Khan Kapkaebuaban”. Late in the Ayutthaya Period, the chedi named Ku Lan Chang was built in the Lan Chang style at the monastery named Wat Nong Bua in Mueang District of Udon Thani Province.

Architectural features in old monasteries of buildings called sim in the Isan vernacular, their ordination and assembly halls, known as ubosot or bot in most regions of Thailand, are common. Examples are the monasteries named Wat Thung Sawang Pako and Wat Pa Phu Khao Thong in Udon Thani Province. The building called sim is a structure of two levels, either with or without walls. At the lower level is a veranda, surrounding a raised platform which forms the upper level. The roof is cantilevered to the extent that it provides protection from sunshine and rainfall. Tassels decorate the lower roof lines which have the appearance of wings spread.

**CONSERVATION OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND PRESERVATION OF ARTEFACTS**

In recent history, the creation of structures and the conservation of the built environment went hand-in-hand, as evident in ever more locations. Examples of this tendency range across the broad spectrum from individual buildings such as an edifice in a monastery or a museum to complex historical parks.

The monastery named Wat Chai Si in Mueang District of Khon Kaen Province, built in 1865, has a
traditional *sim*, the monks’ assembly hall, elsewhere known as *ubosot*, with walls at its upper level. A master painter from Maha Sarakham created murals depicting Buddha’s life story along with people’s everyday life, animals and plants, painted in the realism manner. In Udon Thani Province, there in Ban Phue District, Lao immigrants arriving between 1885 and 1893 built the present structures of the monastery called Wat Non Sila-at Wanaram. It houses two wooden Buddha images in Lan Chang-style attire.

In the Phu Phra Bat Historical Park, Ban Phue District, Udon Thani Province, an ancient *prang* was dismantled and a new miniature *chedi* rebuilt into a concave rock with a surface measuring 193 by 90 centimetres. It took many years to build, from 1920 until completion in 1934. The edifice rising out of the rock is called Phra Phuttha Bat Bua Bok, given its resemblance to the Asiatic pennywort, a locally common forest plant, known in Thai as *bua bok*, or else in the Isan vernacular as *phak nok*.

Building a new monastery, in 1929, at an ancient site in Kumphawapi District of Udon Thani Province, a stupa of the Dvaravati Period was encased in the main pagoda, known as Phra That Don Kaeo, of Wat Maha That Chedi. Resembling the famous Phra That Phanom in Nakhon Phanom Province, the *chedi* is about 36 metres high. It has three tiers, with stucco reliefs on each tier featuring episodes from Buddha’s life story. In the same province, the monks’ assembly hall, *sim*, in the monastery named Wat Thung Sawang Pako was restored in 1932, to lasting effect.

A present landmark of Chaiyaphum Province, the 14-metre tall statue named Chaiyaphum Phithak Buddha, stands in the compound of Wat Chaiyaphum Phithak, locally called Wat Pha Koeng. In the Isan vernacular, the word *koeng* describes the high side of terrain that is not level. In fact, Pha Koeng is a cliff in the Phu Laen Kha Range, with the monastery situated on its top. As the moon would rise above it, the landmark statue is locally called Phra Chan Sio Ok.

Upon the unearthing of the remains of an ancient Khmer sanctuary with a statue of the Buddha seating beneath the canopy of Naga heads, *Phra Nak Prok* in Thai, made of laterite, and other artefacts at the site called Non Wat Pa in Non Sang District of Nong
Bua Lam Phu Province, the site of another such ancient sanctuary was chosen for the construction of a new monastery, starting in 1958. Named Wat Tham Klong Phen, it is located in Mueang District of the same province.

Museums were built and historical parks established for the systematic preservation of the cultural heritage and conversation of the built environment. Two examples are introduced hereunder. The Khon Kaen National Museum, a branch of Thailand’s National Museum, holds fine artefacts found or excavated at numerous sites in the upper part of Isan. They have been added to the museum’s collection for safe-keeping, research, and display.

The Phu Phrabat Historical Park in Ban Phue District of Udon Thani Province covers a mountainous area of 5.5 square kilometres around Khao Phu Phan. Rocks shaped by glacial motion or erosion are scattered all over. There are prehistoric sites at cliffs and in caves, remains of settlements built by combining rocks with structural components, rocks sculpted into the shapes of pagodas and statues, and Buddha statues as well as bai sema, stelae characteristic of the Dvaravati Period.

**Natural Resources and Protected Areas**

Throughout the highlands, there is an abundance of rocks and boulders. They served as a natural resource, both in situ and as required elsewhere. Likewise, much use was made of the ubiquitous laterite, geologically a residual product of decayed mudstone that is red in colour and has a high content of iron oxides and hydroxide of aluminum. Then, there is rock salt which is still exploited in some locations of Udon Thani Province. Water resources are unevenly distributed, both topographically and seasonally. Overall, water supply is precarious, which has a direct impact on the availability of aquatic resources such as fish. Deforestation has taken a big toll of the natural vegetation cover. Hence, the necessity of environmental conservation became evident. Salutary measures were taken through the establishment of nature reserves. They vary in size and by major objective.

Several nature reserves were established in headwater areas. Examples are the Tat Ton National and Sai Thong National parks in Chaiyaphum Province which form...
Tat Ton waterfall in Chaiyaphum Province

Blooming Kra Chiao (turmeric) meadow in Chaiyaphum Province
part of the headwater area of the Chi River and its upstream tributaries. The Tat Ton National Park on the Phu Laen Kha mountain range covers an area of 213 square kilometres. The Sai Thong National Park is located in the Phang Hoei mountain range and covers 319 square kilometres.

The main purpose of most nature reserves is to protect or rehabilitate forests. Their proportion is largest in the mountain ranges, as compared to the highlands. There seems to be no lowland forest left, for any such rare, remaining forest would invariably be a protected area. The following five examples of nature reserves cover parts of more than one province. Overall, they represent the sheer magnitude across the four provinces of Chaiyaphum, Khon Kaen, Nong Bua Lam Phu and Udon Thani. In descending order of area size in square kilometres, these are the national parks named Phu Pha Man (350); Phu Wiang (325); Phu Kao – Phu Phan Kham (322); Nam Phong (197); and Phu Laen Kha (133). Forest reserves are smaller in size such as Than Ngam (125) and Wang Sam Mo (30) in Udon Thani Province. Others include Tham Pha Phuang and Pa Dong Lan in Khon Kaen Province; and Nam Tok Thao To in Nong Bua Lam Phu Province.

An exemplary protected area is the Pa Phu Khiao - Thung Kamang Wildlife Reserve in Chaiyaphum Province. Its area of 1,560 square kilometres encompasses rocky sandstone mountains covered with dense forests which enclose a plateau. In its midst is a grassland of 830 hectares, called Thung Kamang, where herbivorous animals graze and carnivorous animals prey.

The mountainous terrain is literally perforated with caves. There are far too many as to be called up here. Examples are the caves, tham in Thai, named Khrop, Pa Thewada, and Kaeo in Chaiyaphum Province; Arahant, Phaya Nakharat, Lai Thaeng, Khang Khao, Phra, Phu Ta Lo, and Pha Phuang in Khon Kaen Province; Mum, Erawan, Lang, Bon, and Pha Ya in Nong Bua Lam Phu Province; and Lai Mue, Non Sao I, Khon, and Wua Daeng in Udon Thani Province.

Likewise, many waterfalls embellish the headwater areas. They cluster in the high mountains and, hence, are characteristic of some provinces rather than others. Owing
to the terrain, Chaiyaphum Province has most waterfalls, called nam tok in Thai, including Tat Ton, Tat Fa, Pha I-ang, Thep Prathan, Thep Phanom, and Sai Thong. Others are Tat Rong, Tat Yai, Tat Pha, Phalanthong, Huai Mo Tak, Sankayuan, and Huai Khao Lam in Khon Kaen Province; Yung Thong and Than Ngam in Udon Thani Province; and Tat Fa in Nong Bua Lam Phu Province.

Large stretches of mountain ranges appear to be strewn with masses of rocks. The area of greatest concentration is a reserve named Pa Hin Ngam National Park, located in Chaiyaphum Province. This protected area, like similar ones, is littered with large rocks of unusual shapes such as a nail, serpent’s head, ancient castle and radar aerial, a gigantic rock arch, and a rock pool shaped like a volcano cone.

Natural vegetation cover is largely confined to the mountains. Forests are of various types. The spectrum includes evergreen dry highland forests; dense virgin forests; hard-wood forests of both sal trees [Shorea obtusa (Dipterocarpaceae)] and timber trees called daeng in Thai [Xyli xylocarpa (Leguminosae)]; deciduous tree forests; crag forests in steep and rugged rocks and cliffs; and forests with sundry trees. Jungle in the proper sense, hardly penetrable shrubs and scrubs with sparse wood, covers large areas. Also, there are virgin groves of prong [Cycas circinalis (Cycadeae)], a palm-like plant with handsome, long, feathery leaves, as well as expansive bamboo thickets.

Forest tree species include hardwood such as Malabar ironwood [Hopea odorata (Dipterocarpaceae)], krabak [Anisoptera cochinchnensis], daeng, yang [Dipterocarpus alatus (Dipterocarpaceae)] and sal, as well as fir [Abies spp.], pradu [Pterocarpus macrocarpus (Leguminosae)] and nonsri (Peltophorum inerme (Leguminosae)).
Upon the onset of the rainy season, vast patches of savannah in protected areas turn into blooming meadows. During June through August, some green grasslands are dotted with myriads of pale-violet turmeric blossoms \([\text{Curcuma domestica (Zingiberaceae)}]\), befittingly called \textit{bua sawan}, “heavenly blossoming bulbaceous plant”, by local people. Forests and jungles have wild orchids and tuffs of splendid flowers in great variety.

Among the species of wild animals surviving in protected areas are such ungulates as barking deer, mouse-deer or chevrotain, hogdeer and sambar deer; other mammals such as boars, langurs, flying lemurs and Indian civets; fresh-water crocodiles; and birds such as green pigeons, including the pin-tailed and the rare pompadour pigeons, the Siamese fireback pheasant, and the green peafowl.

**Ethnic Diversity**

Like elsewhere in Isan, the present population has several roots. As highlighted in the descriptions of distinctive features of its heartland, one of the assets with regard to development is the rich diversity of cultural traditions. It is officially considered as of great significance for local manufacturing industries, particularly for the One Tambon One Product (OTOP) project, and for the promotion of tourism.

The people called Thai Khorat represent the majority of the native inhabitants in Chaiyaphum Province. Their vernacular is also spoken in the provinces of Nakhon Ratchasima and Buri Ram, even in parts of Lop Buri Province. Their origin has yet to be traced. However, the alternative name of Thai Phoeng, in the Isan vernacular, suggests that they form one of the historically eldest groups, the keepers of tradition and customs, etymologically related to \textit{poeng} in the Isan vernacular.

Cultural traditions are kept alive in many villages whose population is made up of descendants of Lao immigrants. They had been no strangers in that they shared language,
religious faith and mode of livelihood with the Thai. The population in Khon Kaen Province is largely of Lao origin, as evident from their identification as Lao Wiang. Their ancestors hailed from areas to the north of the Mekong River, in the hinterland of the city of Vientiane. Nowadays, both the Thai language and the vernacular known as Lao Wiang are spoken. A smaller proportion of the local population descended from Khmer who became assimilated into the mainstream society. This explains why the Lao Wiang vocabulary contains Khmer words.

The people of Ban Phue District in Udon Thani Province refer to themselves as Thai Phuan. Their origin is traced back to areas in present-day Laos such as the town of Chiang Kwang. Their ancestors’ migration occurred over the centuries, until towards the end of the 19th century. The residents of Nong Bua Lam Phu Province are mainly descendants of immigrants known as Lao Wiang.

Members of a little-known, native ethnic group live in Chaiyaphum as well as in the neighbouring Nakhon Ratchasima and Petchabun provinces. As their Thai name, Chao Bon, indicates, their villages are located in the erstwhile remote highland, there in the districts of Thep Sathit, Ban Khwao and Nong Bua Rawe. They call themselves Nyah Kur, which means mountain (kur) people (nyah). The designation “Yakul” is misleading; it refers to the Jacund, native in remote mountain areas of peninsular Malaysia and Thailand. The language of the Nyah Kur belongs to the Mon-Khmer group. While by far most descendants of the Nyah Kur or Chao Bon became assimilated into the mainstream population, they uphold some of their traditional customs and practices.

As stated in a document published by the Office of the National Cultural Commission, “all these ethnic groups are fully assimilated and consider themselves Thais.”

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND STRATEGIC INTERVENTION

Indigenous knowledge, technical know-how and skills, once essential for sustenance, are increasingly recognized as holding potential for local, regional and national development. Further to examples of
protecting forests and conserving the built environment, as addressed above, rehabilitation requires local wisdom such as the reforestation of Pa Dong Lan in Phu Pha Man and Chum Phae Districts of Khon Kaen Province. Silk and cotton production, together with downstream manufacturing processes, have gained recognition as significant development ventures under the government’s OTOP Project. From among the village based industries producing fabric some examples are introduced hereunder.

On the auspicious occasion of the Fifth Cycle Anniversary of H. M. the Queen, a branch of the Royal SUPPORT Foundation called Sala Mai Thai was established in Chonabot District of Khon Kaen Province. Its specialty is the weaving of silk fabric in traditional patterns known in Thai as mud mee. This is created by weaving silk yarn whose threads are knotted before they are dyed. This results in an amazing variety of designs such as mee ue, mee kho, mee mak chap, mee dok kao or mee phikun. Cotton woven in mud mee design is the fabric for which the villagers of Ban Mueang Phai in Ban Phai District of the same province are praised. There as well, in Mueang, Nong Rues, Phu Wiang and Chum Phae districts, Woman Skill Development Centres promote the dying of cotton yarn using natural substances such as extracts from tree barks.

Silkworms being raised on mulberry silk for yarn production

The sub-district of Ban Na Kha and the Skill Training Centre named Ban Men, both located in Mueang District of Udon Thani Province, set fine examples of the weaving of the fabric known in Thai as pha khit. It is the product of a process by which the fabric is ornamented with embossed or raised configurations. The patterns created in this manner are distinguished as khit ta kai (symbol), khit dok kao (China box-tree blossom), khit khon (human figure), khit chang (elephant), khit ma (horse), khit dao (star), khit kho
(felicitation), khit dok tang (orchid blossom) and khit ing mak wai (rattan fruit bunch). The skill training centre, established by a highly respected nun at Wat Sawang Sila in Mueang District of Nong Bua Lam Phu Province, offers training especially for girls. One of the skills is the manufacturing of a paper known as kradat sa in Thai. It is made using the fibre of the inner bark of the mulberry tree. The craft of pottery is kept alive at places such as Ban Khong Sawan in the same district. There, the Pan Mo Training Centre offers training on the skills required to manufacture ceramic ware.

The significance of apiculture for agriculture, forestry, nutrition, health care and income generation is demonstrated by a local organization of more than one hundred farms engaged in apiculture. Based at Ban Phueng in Phu Khiao District of Khon Kaen Province, the rearing of bees, production of honey, and marketing of honey as well as by-products has salutary effects on the individual participating farms and the environment.

Of the many and varied development ventures relevant across the four provinces, water resource development is of timeless importance. At local level, surface water retention basins and small reservoirs (ang kep nam in Thai) have remained vital since antiquity. Rehabilitation or construction keep increasing their numbers. Examples are Kut Nang Saeng, Sok Tum and Sok Ruak Ka in Khon Kaen Province; Cho Raka and Ban Phet in Chaiyaphum Province; as well as Huai Sam Phat, Huai Sai and Nam Pham in Udon Thani Province. Larger are lakes created through dam construction such as Ubol Rattana Dam in Khon Kaen Province with Nam Phong extending into neighbouring Nong Bua Lam Phu Province; Chulabhorn Dam with Phrom as well as Huai Kum Dam and Lam Pathao Bon dams in Chaiyaphum Province; and Huai Luang as well as the northern part of Lam Pao in Udon Thani Province.

The Mekong Research Institute, a facility established and operated by the multi-national Mekong River Secretariat, is located in Khon Kaen. There, the Regional Development Research Institute was established earlier by the Royal Thai Government. Both organizations are affiliated with Khon Kaen University, the first of Isan, established in the year 1964.
Mekong River, with a total length of 4,425 kilometres the 9th longest river on earth and the 5th longest in Asia. The Mekong River is one of the four arteries of Mainland Southeast Asia. The others are the Irrawaddy River (2,090 km) and the Chao Phraya River inclusive of the Ping River (1,200 km), to the west, and the Red River (500 km), to the east.

The stark variation in terrain between the northern and southern sections of the river course has led to the distinguishing between the Upper and Lower Mekong Regions. The Mekong River and its tributaries rise in high, snow-capped mountains and flow in narrow valleys and through gorges, in the Upper Mekong Region. Near where it reaches the present border triangle of Myanmar, Laos and Thailand, the Mekong River Valley begins to broaden. Toward the south, the downstream section widens into riverine plains and eventually into the vast alluvial plain with its

**Sustaining the Southeast Asian Mainland Artery**

Isan Northern and Eastern Riparian Belt

**Topographical Orientation**

In the north and east of the heartland of Isan, as Thailand’s northeastern region is widely known, lies the riparian belt flanked by the Mekong River. Between the northeastern and northern regions of Thailand, the former is exposed to the Mekong River at greater length and with a larger total area of tributary river basins. Further upstream, the three basins of the Ruak, Kok and Ing rivers equal less than nine percent of the downstream river basins that constitute Isan. Given the much greater length of the section of the Mekong River shared by Isan, the downstream riparian area is about four times larger than in the upstream, northern riparian area in Thailand. In fact, the whole of Isan is part of the Mekong River Basin. All its rivers have their source in its mountains, where forest cover absorbs and stores rainwater, and flow toward the huge Mekong River.
delta. Isan is part of this Lower Mekong Region. This is the section of the main river basin where the Mekong River Secretariat, a consortium of riparian and Non-Asian partner country governments have been implementing numerous programmes of water resource development and related ventures.

The major sources of water in Isan are its mountain ranges, from which the rivers flow that ultimately empty into the Mekong River. Apart from the largest tributary of the Mekong River in Isan, the Mun River, and its large, secondary tributary, the Chi River, all other such rivers have their source in the riparian provinces of the Mekong River. Their sources are of two kinds, groundwater and surface water. Precipitation, largely rainwater, is best absorbed by forests in high mountains which cause rain clouds to discharge. The forest cover virtually sponges up most of the precipitation. Water, the source of life, is plentiful in mountain forests.

The mountains with the headwater areas of rivers which empty into the Mekong River dot the landscape unevenly. They cluster at highest density in the northwest of the riparian belt, are scattered along the river course bending toward the southeast, and form a watershed in the extreme south of Isan. The highest mountain of each massif as well as certain solitary mountains, geologically categorized as inselberg, may serve as the topographical coordinate.

In the west of the riparian belt, the northern-most reaches of the eastern flank of the Phetchabun Mountain Range, situated in present Loei Province, and the numerous mountains in the centre of this province pose a barrier to the river course in north-south direction and cause its bend toward the east. The western massifs in Loei Province are, in descending order by altitude of their highest peaks, Phu Hin Rong Kla, Phu Khat, Phu Plaek, Khao Khrok Ma Hon and Phu Ang Rang. The centrally located massifs include, arranged likewise, Phu Luang, Phu Ruea, Phu Pha Hat Thai, Phu Kradueng, Phu Pha Sat, Phu Ho, Phu Khao Yai, Phu Pueai and Phu Son Champa. Major rivers flowing from these mountain areas and emptying into the Mekong River include Huai Nam Man, Mae Nam Hueang and Nam Loei.

The elongated province of Nong
Khai, stretched out alongside the Mekong River, is far less mountainous. From west to east, in parallel with the river course, are the massifs of Phu Pha, Phu Ya Ao and Phu Wua Lang Tham Po. The major tributaries of the Mekong River crossing this province rise in the mountains of the neighbouring provinces of Udon Thani and Sakon Nakhon. They are Nam Mong, Huai Luang and Nam Songkhram. The Songkhram River is the third longest river of Isan. It empties into the Mekong River in the neighbouring province of Nakhon Phanom.

The large plains and upland areas of Nakhon Phanom Province are bordered by the Phu Langka Klang massif in the north and the Phu Lan Chang massif in the south. Main rivers include Huai Thuai, Huai Bang Ko and Lam Nam Bang.

In contrast, the area of Mukdahan
Province is largely mountainous and hilly. In its west are, in descending order of altitudes of highest peaks, the massifs named Phu Moi and Phu Lek Fai. Centrally located are the massifs of Phu Pham, Phu Mae Nang Mon and Phu Si Than. The south has the Phu Mai Sang, Phu Rasae and Phu Phaeng Ma massifs. Tributaries of the Mekong River include Huai Bang Sai, Huai Muk and Huai Bang I.

The Phu Rasae massif reaches into Amnat Charoen Province, with the Phu Kaset, Phu Phak Pueai and Phu Sing massifs in its middle. The main rivers are Huai Kaeo Maeng, Huai Thom and Lam Sebai. The latter river is one of those flowing either directly into the Mekong River upstream of its confluence with the Mun River, or into the Mun River. The others are Huai Phra Lao, Lam Sebok and Huai Tung Lung.

South of the Mun River, which together with the Chi River forms the largest river basin of Isan, is the western flank of the mountain range which forms a watershed. In north-south direction lie the massifs of Phu Chan Daeng, Phu Yai, Phu Man Kaeo, Phu Chong Na Yoi and Phu Khi Suek, all in the eastern reach of the Dong Rak Range and situated in Ubon Ratchathani Province. The two main rivers flowing into the Mun River are the Lam Dom Yai and Lam Dom Noi.

These mountains with headwater areas and river basins broadening into the plain alongside the mighty Mekong River form the northern and eastern riparian belt of Isan.

Its area of some 65,000 square kilometres amounts to 38 percent of the total area of Isan and approximately equals the size of Sri Lanka. Also, the area of this belt is about four times larger than the combined area of the Ruak, Kok and Ing River Basins in the extreme North of Thailand.
PREHISTORY

Since time immemorial, the Mekong River was not a border, much less a barrier. What may seem to be an obstacle did, in fact, serve as the main artery of communication and transportation in the Mekong Region. Crossing the river was infinitely easier than covering comparable distances over land. In short, accessibility particularly of the riparian belt and of its immediate hinterland was easiest via the Mekong River.

Like in other parts of Isan, various fossils were found at some sites. The oldest, to date, are fossils of small corals stuck together in a slab. They are identified as *Lublinophyllum Thailand*, aged over 300 million years. This implies that the area of present Loei Province must have been under sea water. On a high plateau in the Phu Luang Plant and Wildlife Preserve, situated in the same province, dinosaur fossils aged 120 million years were found. In the mountains of Don Tan District, Mekdahan Province, petrified mollusc shells were excavated at a depth of 13 metres. They were identified as about 27 million years old and are worldwide the third such rare finding. Further south, in the Pha Taem National Park, located in Ubon Ratchathani Province, fossils of sea shells, pebbles, and grains enclosed in big stone slabs were found which are about one million years old and are worldwide the third such rare finding. Further south, in the Pha Taem National Park, located in Ubon Ratchathani Province, fossils of sea shells, pebbles, and grains enclosed in big stone slabs were found which are about one million years old and are worldwide the third such rare finding.

*Pha Taem cliff above the Mekong River*
years old.

Traces of human habitat were found in the four provinces of Loei, Mukdahan, Amnat Charoen, and Ubon Ratchathani. These are, characteristically, prehistoric pictographs in mountain areas. Examples were found in the caves named Phaya Nakharat and Lai Thaeng in the Phu Pha Man National Park, which straddles Khon Kaen and Loei provinces. The cave of Fa Mue Daeng on the Pha Thoep Mountain, a cliff rather whose collapsed overhang created a cave-like enclosure, is the landmark of the Phu Pha Thoep National Park in Mukdahan Province. It has numerous prehistoric pictographs drawn in red colour which are older than 5,000 years.

Similar prehistoric pictographs are one of the major attractions of the Phu Sa Dok Bua National Park, straddling Mukdahan, Amnat Charoen and Yasothon provinces. Over a length of 60 metres, between three and five metres above the bottom, altogether 98 pictographs adorn the Phu Pha Taem Cliff. They were dated as being 3,000 to 4,000 years old. Another major attraction of the Phu Sa Dok Bua National Park is the ancient vessel drum known as Klong Maho Rathuek. As its name suggests, it might have been cast, put into the spot at high altitude and used as an alarm drum. It is a one-sided bronze drum, 86 centimetres in diameter and 90 centimetres long. Its face features an embossed figure showing a sun with 14 notched rays. On its side it has four figures of
frogs. This 3,000 year-old artefact, found in 1938, is kept in an especially constructed building at Wat Matchimawat, also known as Wat Klang, in Don Tan District.

Two archaeological sites in Amnat Charoen Province hold evidence of prehistoric human habitats. At the Ban Pong Mueang Archaeological Site, three distinctive layers were excavated. At the lowest level, human skeletons, idols of worshipping, and pottery were found. Bronze axe-blades and baked clay pottery were excavated at the Don Yang Archaeological Site.

The most spectacular attraction in the Pha Taem National Park, Ubon Ratchathani Province, are the Taem and Kham Cliffs [Pha Taem and Pha Kham] adorned with prehistoric pictographs in colour, which are at least 3,000 years old. Also called drawings or paintings, altogether 300 pictographs in red and ochre colours cover cliff walls over the total length of 170 metres. Archaeologists grouped these pictographs into four figurative categories, including animals such as elephants, stomping buffaloes, turtles and gigantic catfish, tools and utensils, geometric designs, and human images.

Nearby, in the surroundings of the monastery named Wat Phu Anon, a cave has similar prehistoric pictographs.
EARLY HISTORY

The past of some places in the riparian belt is shrouded in legends. One such account relates the origin of the pagoda known as Phra That Phanom, in present That Phanom District of Nakhon Phanom Province. Accordingly, about 2500 years ago, an itinerant monk by the name of Maha Kasapa came to the region carrying a fragment of the chest bone of Lord Buddha. On that venerable monk’s advice, the original edifice, a pagoda, was built of brick. Therein, the holy relic was enshrined. Around this focal point of worshipping, settlements such as the present town of Nakhon Phanom are said to have been established.

A human habitat which flourished 2,000 to 1,500 years ago existed in present Mueang District of Ubon Ratchathani Province. At the Ban Kan Lueang Archaeological Site, artefacts such as pottery and ceramic ware, implements such as iron axe-blades, ornaments such as beads, and plenty of paddy husks were excavated. The sheer fact that no human skeletons were found led to the dating of this habitat as one of early history, not of prehistory. The findings are preserved and displayed in the Ban Kan Lueang Museum, set up in 1996 by the Fine Arts Department in the compound of the monastery named Wat Ban Kan Lueang. On a rock in the Phu Manat Cave the reach of power of Si Maha Netaravoraman, also known as Chitrasen, ruler of the Chenla Kingdom, is inscribed in Sanskrit language. It was dated as of the 6th century.¹

¹ All historical data, i.e. years and centuries, refer to the chronology of the Western Calendar.
Ancient sandstone stelae, known in Thai as *bai sema*,\(^2\) are characteristic of the Dvaravati Period. At four archaeological sites in Amnat Charoen Province, artefacts of the Dvaravati culture were found. Traces of an ancient city extant during the 6th to 8th centuries were found at the Prei Hue Dong Archaeological Site. Artefacts include Buddha images, several *bai sema*, and among them one stela with the sculpture of two parrots, the like of which has never been found anywhere else. Similar are the findings at the Old Wat Dong Tao Archaeological Site, including more of the said stelae and Buddha images in the Dvaravati style. Likewise unique are the remains preserved at the monastery named Wat Phu Silo in Mueang District. It has Dvaravati sandstone battlements into which flowers and leaves, with blooming lotus at their base, were carved. The other rare artefact is a large, white sandstone Dvaravati stela, *bai sema*, dating from the 7th to 8th centuries, found in the second of the three layers of human habitat, excavated in mounds of the Ban Pong Mueang Archaeological

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\(^2\) The *bai sema* is a stela, a sculpted stone slab shaped like a leaf. Just as leaves vary in shape, so do the neatly carved stelae. These *bai sema* are placed at the four corners and at the four points where the two central axes of any ordination hall, known as *ubosot* in Thai, intersect the alignment of the corner points. The *bai sema* demarcate the sacrosanct ground surrounding the *ubosot* inside any Buddhist monastery.
This second level shows various traces of a Dvaravati Period settlement.

Three places in the western and upstream section of the riparian belt were apparently settled during the Dvaravati Period. They are located in Loei Province, namely, Ban Bung Phak Kam, Ban Pak Baeng and Ban Na Lak. While most of the preserved stelae, *bai sema*, were made of white sandstone, few were sculpted from red sandstone. Many depict a stupa carved into the mid-section. The altogether 40 stelae are grouped into seven categories, based on shape and design. One stela bears a 12-line inscription in Pallawa characters. The sandstone stelae found at Ban Pak Baeng, in 1965, were engraved with the silhouette of a stupa. In contrast, the stelae of Ban Na Lak show a variety of engravings. Upon the transfer of all but one stela each left at the original sites, these precious artefacts are preserved in the Khon Kaen National Museum.

In due course of restoration of the collapsed *chedi* named Phra That Bang Phuan, situated in Mueang District of Nong Khai Province, it became apparent that the monastery was founded in the Dvaravati Period. There still is a pagoda built of bricks in that period, with sandstone *bai sema*, a Dvaravati stone inscription, and an ancient pond. Two caves in the Ban Phu Historical Park of Nong Khai Province, called Tham Wua and Tham Khon, have traces of murals depicting the Buddha in the Dvaravati style.

In Mueang District of Nakhon Phanom Province, the very old monastery named Wat Maha That has a stupa, *chedi* in Thai, which was originally built in the year 607. It rests on a square base with a side length of 5.85 metres and rises to the height of 24 metres.

The present monastery named Wat Thung Si Wila, located in Khueang Nai District of Ubon Ratchathani Province, has both its old *ubosot* and old *vihara* encompassed by *bai sema*, of various shapes and designs. Enshrined is the laterite statue of the Buddha seated under a canopy of Naga heads sculpted like monkey faces, a piece of Dvaravati art. The compound is surrounded by an ancient wall, with a large, ancient pond outside.
To date, few remains of the Khmer Period were found in the riparian belt, compared to the heartland and the western as well as southern plateaus of Isan. In reconstructing the Phra That Phanom Chedi, the pagoda in which the highly revered relic of the Buddha is enshrined, it became evident that the edifice had been built on an older square base of a pagoda constructed in the 9th century. In addition to Khmer architectural features, entire components recovered from the original monument, which collapsed in 1975, were incorporated into the rebuilt structure. These are the ancient and extremely interesting brick reliefs which have remained intact and decorate the base of the chedi, since its reconstruction which was completed in 1979. They are in the Khmer style known as Kulen3. Although on the eastern side nothing remains, on the northern side is Vishnu, mounted on a garuda, a mythical bird with the head, wings, talons and beak of an eagle and the body and limbs of a man, and surrounded by attendants.

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3 The Kulen Style represents the earliest stylistic phase in the Angkor Period (802-1432). Its name is derived from the Kulen Mountain Range, located some 40 kilometres northeast of Angkor, where the open quarries were situated which supplied most of the stone blocks for the construction of Angkor’s monuments. The Khmer ruler Jayavarman II [802-850] had his second capital built there, named Mahendraparvata. With the Kulen style of the early 9th century, the body and occasionally the supporting arch disappear. The men’s smooth sampot hugs the knees, and its folds brim out over the left thigh. The upper part of the sampot is maintained by a cloth belt draped with the fabric. No feminine statue has ever been found. (Dawn Rooney, Angkor, An Introduction to the Temples. Hong Kong: Odyssey, 1999, pp. 24 & 107; Jean Laur, Angkor, An illustrated guide to the monuments. Paris: Flammarion, 2002. pp. 17 & 115)
On the western side are the four guardians of the earth placing offerings into the Buddha's alms bowl. On the southern side, the departure of the Buddha for Nirvana is depicted.

To the west of Nakhon Phanom Province, in the neighbouring province of Nong Khai, two caves in the Ban Phu Historical Park, called Tham Wua and Tham Khon, have traces of murals depicting Hindu deities from the Khmer Period. To the south, in neighbouring Mukdahan Province, one of the major attractions of the Phu Pha Thoep National Park is the cave named Tham Phra. Inside are several Buddha images which date from the time when a Khmer settlement existed nearby. In the Phu Sa Dok Bua National Park, the high plateau located in Don Tan District of the same province, where the ancient vessel drum known as Klong Maho Rathuek was found in 1938, is also the site from which the Khmer artefacts were collected that are preserved and displayed in the museum attached to the monastery named Wat Matchimawat, also known as Wat Klang. The first town at the site of present Ubon Ratchathani Town was likely established by the Khmer, in the 10th century. The Khmer sanctuary of Prasat Ban Ben, situated in Thung Si Udom District of Ubon Ratchathani Province, has three prang or pagodas built of brick on separate laterite bases. Excavations conducted by the Fine Arts Department, since 1990, yielded nine statues of deities laid flat on their backsides, on top of each other. Also found was an image of Indra riding the elephant named Erawan. All this is evidence that the sanctuary was built and maintained during the 10th to 12th centuries.

MONUMENTS AND ARTEFACTS TRACED TO THE 14TH UNTIL 18TH CENTURIES: EXAMPLES OF THE LAN CHANG STYLE

In historical time, rivers served as the link between the land areas on either banks as well as upstream and downstream areas. The inhabitants of riparian lands including the tributary river basins used rivers for transportation. Rafts and boats of all kinds carried commodities as well as people. This explains why ancient realms established and maintained relationships, or expanded across rivers. The historical kingdom of Lan...
Chang is one such example along the Mekong River. Its historical influence on the riparian belt of Isan is evident, to this day.

The area in the northwest of the riparian belt of Isan, now Loei Province, was the territory of a small principality under the suzerainty of the Thai kingdom of Ayutthaya or, at times, part of the kingdom of Lan Chang. It became integral part of Siam in the Fourth Reign (1851-1868). There, numerous structures give testimony of its past as part of the Lan Chang territory.

In the reigns of King Maha Chakrapat of Ayutthaya and King Chai Chettha of Si Satthana Kanahut, also known as Wiang Chan, the present Vientiane, a spot on the watershed between the Nan and Mekong Rivers, marking the border between their kingdoms, was chosen to have a chedi or pagoda built. It was constructed during 1560 through 1563. This edifice named Phra That Si Song Rak blends Ayutthaya and Lan Chang architectural features. It rests on a square base with a side length of eight metres and is 32 metres high. It holds relics of the Buddha and symbolizes the alliance between the two monarchs. This sanctuary houses two highly revered Buddha images, one statue of the Buddha in the Lan Chang Style which is 19.19 metres high, and one of the Buddha seated under a canopy of Naga heads, in the Tibetan style.

To this day, the people in Dan Sai District, where this sanctuary is located, annually celebrate in May the anniversary of its founding by floating a large krathong, a float made of stitched banana leaves on which tapers and incense sticks are placed amidst elaborate decoration as a propitiatory offering, and carrying innumerable smaller ones to the chedi, while rockets are launched to entice rainfall. This belief is upheld as well by the worshippers of the Buddha image known as Ong Saen or Fon Saen Ha in the 500-year old monks’ assembly hall, ubosot, of the monastery named Wat Pho Chai in Na Haeo District. It is believed that wherever this bronze image, cast in

4 The internationally adopted transliteration of Vientiane is featured hereunder to designate the historical as well as contemporary city of Vientiane, situated on the northern bank of the Mekong River and capital city of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Lao PDR for short, or unofficially Laos.
the Chiang Saen style, is placed rainfall will bring relief from drought.

At Wat Lat Pu in Tha Li District, the chedi named Phra That Satcha rests on a unique base. It is shaped like a lotus blossom with three tiers of petals, about one metre high, from which the chedi rises 33 metres. Its top has a 7-tiered, white umbrella. The structure of the chedi proper resembles that of the famous Phra That Phanom Chedi. The old monastery named What Tha Khaek in Chiang Khan District has three rare Buddha images, which were sculpted of sandstone more than 300 years ago. The Wat Huai Hao Inscription relates in 22 lines a royal command of King Photiworawasa of Lan Chang. The most precious artefact from the Lan Chang Period in Nong Khai Province is the Buddha image named Luang Pho Phra Chao Ong Tue. It is a 4-metre high statue, created on the order of King Chaiya Chettha of Wiang Chan, present Vientiane, by Lan Chang artisans, in 1562. This statue of the Buddha in the posture of subduing Mara was cast of an alloy of gold [thong kham], brass [thong lueang] and silver [ngoen]. The word “tue” in the name of the image signifies its weight expressed in an old Isan measure; one “tue” equals one billion grams. Of the exceptional kind is the chedi named Phra That Nong Khai, also appropriately called Phra That Klang Nam, which is situated in Mueang District of the same province. It was built on an islet, known as don in the Isan vernacular, sometime during the 15th to 17th centuries.

The present town of Nakhon Phanom has a chequered history. It is situated in a section of Mekong River banks where a succession of towns had been founded, on either the east or west bank. At times, there also were twin towns facing each other across the river. For example, there was a town named “Marakha Nakhon” in the ancient kingdom of Si Khotrabun on the east bank, in present Laos. As chronicled, it was restored by a Lan Chang ruler, in 1357. By 1514 it was abandoned. Another town was built on the east bank, near the present town of Tha Khaek, in present Laos, and named “Mueang Si Khotrabun”. In 1747, its last ruler, Phra Thammaracha, relocated the town to the west bank and named it “Mueang Nakhon”.

The old monastery named Wat Okat Si Bua Ban in Mueang District
of Nakhon Phanom Province houses a Buddha image which was created on the order of the ruler of Nakhon Si Khotrabun, in 1328. The famous Phra That Phanom Chedi in the district town of That Phanom, built 2,500 years ago according to a Buddhist legend, was renovated in 1641, on the order of the king of Lan Chang. Upon its collapse in 1975, reconstruction was carried out in such a way that ancient Lan Chang ornaments recovered from the original monument were incorporated and preserved. The preceding renovation of 1641 explains the semblance of the Phra That Phanom Chedi and the Phra That Luang Chedi in present Vientiane, and why the Phra That Phanom Chedi has remained a rallying point for both Thai and Lao Buddhists. In Tha Uthen District of the same province, the monastery named Wat Trai Phum houses the highly revered Buddha statue known as Phra Bang Wat Trai Phum. It is an image in the posture of calming the ocean. The two-metre high statue in the Lan Chang style was cast in 1565. It is placed on an octagonal base and supported by eight elephant sculptures. People believe that this image does grant rainfall. In Mueang District, the monastery named Wat Maha That has some buildings with architectural details and ornamental features in the Wiang Chan Style, especially its very old ubosot, the monks’ assembly hall. An old image of the Buddha in the subduing Mara posture, created in the Lan Chang Style, is housed in Wat Pho Si of the same district. The Chai Buri Stone Inscription, written in Lao language, narrates the history of an ancient town.

On the west bank of the Mekong River, opposite the town of Sawannakhet, the settlement of Ban Luang Phonsin was founded and built during 1767 through 1770. By then, the monastery named Wat Si Mongkhon Tai already existed there. It houses a Buddha statue built of brick. Under a Bo Tree, the small iron-cast Buddha statue named Phra Chao Ong Luang is placed. Later named Mukdahan, the settlement was and is locally called Mueang Muk. The monastery of Wat Si Bun Rueang, also known as Wat Ban Tai, in Mueang District houses in its ubosot, or chapel, a bronze Buddha statue cast in the Lan Chang style. Further south, in Mueang District of Amnat Charoen Province, lies the
monastery named Wat Phra Lao Thep Nimit. Its ubosot or chapel, built in the Lan Na architectural style, houses a Buddha statue of the Lao Wiang Chan style. Created in 1720, it is widely recognized as the most beautiful statue of Isan in the posture of subduing Mara.

The present town of Ubon Ratchathani was founded by two Lao aristocrats who had fled from Wiang Chan, present Vientiane, after falling in disgrace with King Siriboonsan. They sided with King Tak Sin and led the military campaigns to bring Champasak and Luang Prabang under the suzerainty of the Thon Buri Kingdom. The cave known as Tham Muet in the Pha Taem National Park, located in Khong Chiam District of Ubon Ratchathani Province, has wooden Buddha images carved in the Lan Chang style.

Two inscriptions on sandstone slabs are preserved at the monastery of Pa Chanthaburi in Nong Khai Province. Inscription #1 tells of a ruler who built a monastery. In moving the stone slab repeatedly, its lower part broke off. Hence, only a fragment of this inscription is preserved. Inscription #2 conveys the order to adhere to and support Buddhism. This stone slab is in good condition. The town of Nakhon Phanom, once again abandoned, was relocated over a distance of about 52 kilometres, in 1778.

CONSOLIDATION OF THAI POLITY

Town and province of Ubon Ratchathani, earlier part of the realm of King Siribunson of Lan Chang with his capital in Vientiane, were firmly integrated into Siam during the reign of King Tak Sin. On the king’s order, building of the present city was started near the Mun River in 1780, and it was named Ubon Ratchathani.

Nakhon Phanom, once the west-bank part of a twin-city on the banks of the Mekong River, while part of the kingdom of Si Khotrabun, was again relocated in the First Reign of the Royal House of Chakri, in 1790, and named Nakhon Phanom. In Mueang District of the newly gained territory of Ubon Ratchathani, the construction of the monastery named Wat Maha Wanaram, also known as Wat Pa Yai, was started in 1807. It houses a Lan Chang Style image of the Buddha in the subduing Mara posture, made of
brick, plastered with stucco, and
gilded.

At the site of an ancient pagoda,
shaped like a mondop, in which a
Buddha footprint is enshrined,
located in Mueang District of Ubon
Ratchathani Province, the monastery
named Wat Thung Si Mueang was
built beginning in the Second Reign
[1809-1824]. Its buildings show an
architectural blend of Rattanakosin
and Lan Chang styles. The outstanding
edifice is the building that houses the
Tripitaka Library. It was constructed
of wood and erected in the middle
of a pond. It reflects a blend of Thai,
Burmese and Lan Chang styles. Its
roof is a blend of Burmese and Thai
styles with Lan Chang influence.

The monastery named Wat Pho
Chai, located in Mueang District of
Nong Khai Province, houses
Buddha images originally placed in
monasteries of Vientiane and
brought across the Mekong River in
the Third Reign [1824-1851].

The newly built monastery of
Wat Thung Si Mueang had its
vihara, the prayer hall, decorated
with murals painted in the Third
Reign [1824-1851]. The murals
depict the life of Lord Buddha and
narrate the story of Lord Buddha’s
ten incarnations. They clearly reflect
the artistic style of the preceding
reign of King Rama II, with the
settings and the human characters
portraying the traditional way of life
in Isan.

During the Fourth Reign [1851-
1868], the former small principality
of Loei was firmly integrated into the
Kingdom of Siam. In 1853, the walls
of the vihara in the monastery
named Wat Pho Chai, situated in Na
Haeo District of Loei Province, were
decorated with murals depicting
episodes from Lord Buddha’s life story
and scenes of the local, surrounding
area. Further downstream the Mekong
River, in Mueang District of Nakhon
Phanom Province, the monastery
named Wat Si Thep Praditharam was
built, beginning in 1859.

The first monastery in Isan of the
Thammayut Buddhist Congregation
was constructed, with funding provided
by King Rama IV [1851-1868],
beginning in 1853. Its architecture
reflects, by royal command, the
interfacing of cultural traditions in
Mainland Southeast Asia. Vietnamese
artisans designed and constructed the
ubosot, the monks’ assembly hall, by
combining the base in the ancient
Khmer style with a Western-style
hall, topped by a roof in the Thai style. It houses the Phra Sapphanya Chao image of the Buddha. Named Wat Supattanaram Woravihan, the monastery is located on the bank of the Mun River, in Mueang District of Ubon Ratchathani Province. In its compound is a small, open-air museum with a precious collection of rare artefacts. In chronological order, these include sandstone stelae, bai sema, sculpted in the Dvaravati Period; Pre-Angkor style Khmer lintels\(^5\) dated as of the 7\(^{th}\) century, reliefs sculpted of sandstone, sculpted columns in the Baphuon style, known in Thai as Ba Puan\(^6\), as well as stone images of the Hindu deity Ganesh; and Buddha statues in the Chinese style.

Another monastery, whose construction was started in 1855, is Wat Si Ubon Rattanaram, also known as Wat Si Thong, situated in the same district. In its present appearance, the ubosot resembles, after reconstruction, the famous Wat Benchamabophit in Bangkok, which was built during the Fifth Reign [1868-1910]. The ubosot of Wat Si Ubon Rattanaram houses the precious Buddha image named Phra Kaeo Bussarakham, sculpted from topaz in the Chiang Saen Period and transferred from a monastery in Vientiane, in the Third Reign [1824-1851]. During the Fifth Reign [1868-1910], in the same district another monastery was built, named Wat Chaeng, which has been held in high reverence ever since its completion in 1888.

Farther north and upstream on the Mekong River, the Ho Revolt Suppression Memorial (Anusawari Prap Ho) was erected. Inscriptions on this monument in Thai, Lao, Chinese and English languages relate how Ho traders running mule caravans between Yunan in China

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5 Lintels are highly decorated rectangular sandstone blocks spanning a doorway, window or any opening, and often support the fronton or gable. The carved face fills the entire space with scenes inspired by mythology. (Dawn Rooney, Angkor: An introduction to the temples. Hong Kong: Odyssey, 1999, p. 105)

6 When the Baphuon style (referred to as Ba Puan in Thai) was fully developed in the middle of the 11\(^{th}\) century, temples had reached gigantic proportions. Continuous vaulted and columned galleries, which were constructed off tiered platforms, were common features. The sculpture of the Baphuon style is very distinctive as it was even more naturalistic than previous styles. (Dawn Rooney, Angkor: An Introduction to the Temples. Hong Kong: Odyssey, 1999, p. 109)
and the north of Siam, now Thailand, instigated turmoil. In 1886 their revolt was crushed.

RESTORATION OF MONUMENTS AND PRESERVATION OF ARTEFACTS

In contemporary Thailand, great care is taken of the spiritual and physical heritage. Such dedication became obvious upon the sudden collapse, in 1975, of the famous Buddhist chedi named Phra That Phanom on the Mekong River, in That Phanom District of Nakhon Phanom Province. This edifice was built first, it is believed, 2500 years ago and enlarged as well as renovated repeatedly, over the centuries. In the course of reconstruction, completed in 1979, ancient components recovered from the original monument created during the Dvaravati, Khmer, and Lan Chang periods were meticulously incorporated into the resurrected, square based, 53.6-metre high chedi, which continues to be the repository of a precious relic, a fragment of the Buddha’s chest bone.

In like manner, the cultural heritage was preserved in three monasteries, the first and the second situated in Chiang Khan District of Loei Province and the third in Renu Nakhon District of Nakhon Phanom Province. Wat Phra Phuttha Bat Phu Khwai Ngoen, which houses a footprint of the Buddha measuring 120 by 45 centimetres, was registered as a historical site in 1935. Wat Si Khun Mueang, whose architecture is a blend of Lan Na and Lan Chang styles, was built in 1942 to house a historical wooden, gilded Buddha image in the Lan Chang art style. Wat Phra That Renu, whose chedi is 35 metres high, houses in its ubosot or chapel a highly venerated Lan Chang, gilded Buddha image in the meditation posture.

Commemorating recent political history of the 20th century, two sites are preserved. One is the residence of Ho Chi Minh, the Vietnamese independence fighter and communist leader. Named Ban Than Ho Chi Minh, it is situated at Ban Na Chok, Mueang District, Nakhon Phanom Province, where the exiled politician had taken refuge from 1924 until 1931. At short distance to the south, in Don Tan District of Mukdahan Province, is the camp of the Communist Party of Thailand, known as
Than Patibatikan Woraphat. Upon the cadres’ surrender, it was recognized as an important historical site in 1977. Since the transformation of the surrounding mountain area into the Phu Sa Dok Bua National Park, it has become one of its attractions.

From among the many artefacts of historical periods, typically the finest examples were moved from their original sites to be preserved and displayed in museums at the local or regional level. The unique vessel drum, Klong Maho Rathuek, which was found on a high plateau in Don Tan District of Mukdahan Province, can be viewed in a local museum. The 3,000-year old drum likely used to strike alarm is kept, together with ancient Khmer artefacts, in an especially constructed building within the compound of the monastery named Wat Matchimawat, also known as Wat Klang in the same district. Also in the compound of another monastery, in Mueang District of Ubon Ratchathani Province, the findings from the Ban Kan Lueang Archaeological Site are preserved. The local Ban Kan Lueang Museum, set up in 1996, has a collection of implements such as iron axe-blades, utensils such as ceramic ware, and ornaments such as beads, dated as of some 2,000 years ago.

Other artefacts were removed from their original site, to be kept at museums which are regional subunits of Thailand’s National Museum, based in Bangkok. Examples are the branches in the towns of Ubon Ratchathani and Khon Kaen. The latter holds all but one sandstone stelae, bai sema, found at Ban Pak Baeng and Ban Na Lak, in Wang Saphung District of Loei Province. There, these boundary markers once surrounded long dilapidated ubosot or chapels. Merely one stela each was left as a token at the original sites.

**RECENT RELIGIOUS EDIFICES**

In the 20th century, numerous monasteries were established in Isan’s riparian provinces of the Mekong River. Wat Phu Thok with the Siri Wihara Chedi, located in Si Wilai District of Nong Khai Province, was built on the peak of the solitary sandstone mountain, appropriately named Phu Thok. This elevated monastery is accessible by ascending
on a wooden jetty spiraling around the mountain, originally built to transport construction materials, and now providing access for monks, novices, worshippers and visitors.

Examples of monasteries built in Nakhon Phanom Province are, in chronological order of their construction, Wat Phra That Tha Uthen in the district of the same name, whose chedi is a square-shaped, plastered brick structure of three tiers, similar in appearance to the famous Phra That Phanom Chedi; and Wat Phra Si Khun in Na Kae District. Three monasteries are chosen as examples from Mukdahan Province. Two are located in its Wan Yai District. Wat Mano Phirom, originally built by artisans from Vientiane, was a much-admired masterpiece which unfortunately burnt down soon after its completion in 1904. Only seven years later it was completely reconstructed to its original, marvellous appearance. The small ubosot, the monks’ assembly hall of Wat Phra Si Maha Pho, features structural components of Thai, Vietnamese and French architectural styles. The third monastery, Wat Phu Dan Tae, also known as Wat Phutthatho Thammatharo, is located in the province’s Nikhom Kham Soi District. It houses a large Buddha statue.

Larger is the number of examples from Ubon Ratchathani Province. Three are located in Mueang District. They are Wat Burapharam, Wat Ban Na Mueang with its chapel or ubosot built in the shape of the Royal Barge Suphannahong, and

Phra That Tha Uthen, Nakhon Phanom Province
Wat Nong Bua. The last named monastery has the unique Phra That Chedi Si Maha Pho. It was constructed in 25 tapering tiers, with each tier representing one century of Buddhism. The impressive, modern edifice resembles the ancient Buddha Gaya Stupa [Chedi Phuttha Khaya] in North India. Other examples in the province’s Warin Chamrap District are Wat Nong Pa Phong and Wat Pa Nana Chat, and in Khong Chiam District the monastery named Wat Tham Khuha Sawan. The monastery named Wat Si Nuan Saeng Sawang Aram at Ban Chi Thuan in the province’s Khueang Nai District has an extraordinary chapel, owing to the image of a standing lion, created by a Vietnamese artisan and built of brick and stucco.

Construction of the largest Catholic Church in Mainland Southeast Asia was started in 1996. It is located in Wan Yai District of Mukdahan Province. Known as the Martyr Memorial Church, named Sakkan Sathan Phra Marada Haeng Moranasakkhi Wat Song Khon, or called Wat Ban Song Khon, in short, it was consecrated in commemoration of seven Christians who sacrificed their lives. The martyrs were beatified by the late Pope John Paul II. Built in modern architecture, the church is also considered the most beautiful Catholic Church in Mainland Southeast Asia.
Natural Resources

Given the physical geographical conditions, the major natural resource of the riparian belt is water. Along with water come resources which are either immediately dependent on water or become accessible through water. Two examples of the latter are salt and gold which, in historical times, were almost of equal value. Gold has been found in the gravel and sand of numerous streams which empty into the Mekong River and, therefore, in the main river itself. Also, gold ores in the ground have been exploited, to this day, for example in such locations as Ban Na Din Dam in Mueang District and in Ban Nam Phon, Ban Huai Phot and Ban Tha Di Mi in Chiang Khan District of Loei Province.

Like in other parts of Isan, the vast stock of rock salt, presumably the largest geological formation of its kind worldwide, reaches as far as some locations along the Mekong River. In the underground, it expands farther than indicated by the places in which salt farming is still practiced. Examples are called up in the provinces of Nong Khai, Amnat Charoen and Ubon Ratchathani. In the midstream basin of the Songkran River, which straddles the provinces of Nong Khai and Sakon Nakhon, the upland laterite soil hints at the underground salt rock. Salt is still being produced there by either boiling or sun-drying saline groundwater. Virtually every district in Amnat Charoen province has active salt farms. They are concentrated in Phana and Lue Amnat districts as well as in the adjacent districts of Ubon Ratchathani Province. The produce, rock salt, fetches market prices that are up to three times higher than those for sea salt.

Historically, freshwater fishery and fish rearing have been the source of livelihood and economic mainstay of most inhabitants of all riparian settlements. The Mekong River and its tributaries were virtually inexhaustible guarantors of food
security, suppliers of balanced nutrition, and the backbone of the regional market economy. Salt was the vital ingredient of preservation techniques and fermentation processes. Salted, sun-dried fish was a staple-food throughout the entire Isan.

Given the sheer length of the Mekong River and variations in geophysical conditions, fishing, fish rearing, and processing of fish vary by fish species and techniques of catching, trapping and caging among different locations. Most prominent among the fish species is the scaleless giant catfish, called *pla buek* in the Isan vernacular (*Pangasianodon Gigas Chevey*), which lives at a water depth of ten metres. It grows to a length of three metres and a weight of up to 250 kilogrammes. Hence, it is the world’s largest scaleless freshwater fish. It is frequently caught in the sections of the Mekong River alongside the districts of Si Chiang Mai and Sangkhom of Nong Khai Province and of Chiang Khong District, Chiang Rai Province, North Thailand. Examples of other fish species include a great variety of scaleless catfish, known in Isan vernacular as *pla kot lueang, pla kot mo, pla kot pong, pla khoeng*; various carps such as *pla taphian* and *pla yi sok thet*; varieties of catfish, called *pla duk*, including *pla duk thet, pla duk ui* and *pla duk dan*; a large snakehead mullet named *pla chato*; and eels such as *pla lot*.

**ENVIRONMENTAL ATTRACTIONS AND CONSERVATION**

Environmental conservation along the Mekong River is a complex challenge. The sheer fact that this mighty river is both an international waterway and marks the border between two countries poses problems. They are caused by differences in priority-setting and deficiencies in concurring on a common set of criteria for environmental, cultural, social and economic impact assessments, along the entire length of the river. This explains why environmental conservation has salutary effects on the headwater areas of tributaries inside Isan rather than on the western river bank, in as much as it is part of Isan. This section of the river can not possibly be protected to the required intensity without the implementation of
coordinated measures on both river banks and, most importantly, without covering as well both the upstream and downstream sections.

A natural phenomenon would occur out of the Mekong River, in the evening of the 15th day of the waxing moon in the 11th month. According to the Buddhist calendar, this point in time marks the end of the Buddhist Rainy Season Retreat, known as *wan ok phansa* in Thai, which occurs sometime in October. This event is known as *Bang Fai Phaya Nak*, the flaring of luminous balls flung by the mythical serpent called Naga. At dusk, immediately following twilight, iridescent, red-pinkish balls, ranging in size from a thumbnail to an egg, would shoot out of the water to heights of 20 to 50 metres and dissipate. They do not emit any smoke, smell or sound. This spectacle is observed from the river banks in Sangkhom, Si Chiang Mai, Tha Bo, Mueang, Phon Phisai, Rattanawapi, Pak Khat, and Bueng Kan Districts of Nong Khai Province. It is widely believed, by both local people and visitors who would gather in large numbers, that Phaya Nak, the mythical serpent, shows adoration of the Lord Buddha in this marvellous manner. Scientists explained this phenomenon as caused by the emission of gases which result from the fermentation of decaying organic matter in the river bed.

Another fascinating though almost constant sight is the spot at the confluence of the Mun and Mekong Rivers, where the blue water of the Mun River clashes with the brown water of the Mekong River, and their waters are twirled. This turbulent collision is euphoniously circumscribed, in the Isan vernacular, as “*Khong Si Pun*”, meaning “the chief elephant pounding the mortar”. This spot is called *Mae Nam Song Si*, the “two-coloured river”, also known as Don Dan Pak Mae Nam Mun, the “Mun River Mouth Ricochet”.

![Image of the phenomenon](image_url)
One of the natural wonders in the river beds of Isan are rapids, especially those in the Mekong River. Typically the large and broad rapids in the Mekong River would be invisible in the rainy season and surface late in the dry season, from February to May.

Particularly attractive spots are the rapids, known as *kaeng* in Thai, named Khut Khu off Chiang Khan District in Loei Province; those off Bueng Kan District in Nong Khai Province; and Kabao off Wan Yai District in Mukdahan Province. The best-known rapids in the Mun River are Saphue, whose name is borrowed from the Kui language meaning “giant snake”, and Tana which is situated at close distance to the confluence of the Mun and Mekong Rivers. These two rapids are situated in Ubon Ratchathani Province, where also the Phu Chong – Na Yo National Park with its rapids known as Sam Phan Pi and Kalao is located.

**NATURE RESERVES, PROTECTED AREAS, AND BIODIVERSITY**

Protected areas and nature reserves constitute solid evidence of environmental conservation in the headwater areas of tributaries inside the riparian belt of Isan. Large areas in its six provinces were demarcated so as to preserve what is vital and rare. Hereunder, these examples of natural environment and resource conservation are called up by the provinces, as they are situated along the course of the Mekong River.

Much of the mountain area of Loei Province is under environmental protection. Examples are, in descending order by area size in square kilometres, the Phu Luang Plant and Wildlife Preserve (897) straddling parts of Wang Saphung, Phu Ruea, Dan Sai, and Phu Luang Districts; Phu Kradueng National Park (348) in the western part of Phu Kradueng District; Phu Ruea
National Park (121) in Phu Ruea District; Na Haeo National Park in Na Haeo District; and Phu Pha Man National Park (350) in the eastern part of Phu Kradeung District and beyond covering most of Phu Pha Man District of neighbouring Khon Kaen Province.

The by far largest protected area in Nong Khai Province is the Phu Wua Wildlife Reserve (186), straddling parts of Bung Khla, Seka, and Bueng Khong Long districts. Straddling the eastern part of Bueng Khong Long District in Nong Khai Province and the western parts of Ban Phaeng and Na Thom districts in Naknon Phanom Province lies the Phu Langka National Park (50).

Mukdahan Province shares with two neighbouring provinces the richly endowed Phu Sa Dok Bua National Park (231) straddling parts of Don Tan District in Mukdahan Province, Chanuman District in Amnat Charoen Province, and Loeng Nok Tha District in Yasothon Province. Another protected area is the Mukdahan National Park, also called Phu Pha Thoep National Park (48.5) in Mueang District.

The forest park named Don Chao Pu in Mueang District of Amnat Charoen Province is known as a habitat of large groups of monkeys on 32 hectares of mixed, deciduous forest.

Protected areas in Ubon Ratchathani Province can be distinguished by their terrain, in the mountains and by the Mekong as well as Mun Rivers. The Phu Chong – Na Yoi National Park (686) straddles large parts of Na Chaluai, Nam Yuen and Buntharik districts; it is part of the so-called “Emerald Triangle” whose adjacent, complementary dense forest areas are situated in Cambodia and Laos. In the mountain area of the province’s northern area is the Pha Taem National Park (140), straddling parts of Khong Chiam, Si Mueang Mai, and Pho Sai Districts. Near the confluence of the Mun and Mekong Rivers is the Kaeng Tana
National Park (80), straddling the northern part of Sirindhorn and the southern part of Khong Chiam districts.

Masses of rocks are characteristic of the high mountain areas with their vast plateaus. Examples are the mountains named Phu Luang and Phu Rua in Loei Province, where particularly the eroded limestone cliffs in the Suan Hin Pha Ngam Park have bizarre forms such as rock arches. Bung Khla District in Nong Khai Province has wide areas strewn with strangely shaped sandstone rocks and boulders. In its Ban Phu Historical Park, some rock formations were named after Buddhist legends and folklore.

Mukdahan National Park, albeit small in area size yet dotted with eleven mountains, has numerous rocks which are naturally stacked and formed into different shapes such as a blooming lotus, a boot, a crown, a jet, a UFO, a crocodile, a dragon, an aeroplane, and a Chinese-style gazebo. Among the attractions of Phu Sa Dok Bua National Park are several large stone flatlands. Altogether eleven basins in the rocks, with diameters of two to five metres, hold water throughout the year with a variety of small lotus plants.

A well-known feature is the ensemble of odd stone formations called Sao Chaliang, rocks which tower resembling mushrooms, on the high plateau in the Pha Taem National Park of Ubon Ratchathani Province. Similar attractions in the same province exist in the Phu Chong – Na Yoi National Park with its “stone park” called Suan Hin Phlan Yao and the rocky fields of Phlan Kong Kwian.

Cliffs are another ubiquitous feature. Spectacular examples abound in the provinces of Loei, Mukdahan and Ubon Ratchathani. Cliffs are prominent features of the terrain in Loei Province on mountains such as

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Phu Luang; Phu Pha Man with its famous fir cliffs named Pha Man, Pha Nok Khao, and Pha Sam Yot; the lone, steep-sided mountain of Phu Kradueng with its jagged cliffs named Pha Nok Aen, Pha Lom Sak, and Pha Mak Duk; the mountain shaped like a Chinese junk, appropriately named Phu Ruea with its cliffs called Pha Lon Noi and Pha Sam Thong; and the “park of beautiful cliffs”, Suan Hin Pha Ngam, which evokes comparison with the limestone cliffs in Kunming, China.

Mukdahan National Park has, in some parts, steep cliffs, and so does the Phu Sa Dok Bua National Park in the same province with cliffs as major attractions such as Pha Makluea, Pha Hom, and Pha Taek. Sheer cliffs are the hallmarks of Pha Taem National Park, especially those named Pha Taem and Pha Kham, as well as one of the attractions in Kaeng Tana National Park with its Lan Pha Phueng, all located in Ubon Ratchathani Province. Cliffs which serve as conduits of mountain streams are called up further below, in the section where exceptional waterfalls are presented.

Almost typically cliffs are the physical setting of caves and grottoes, which are common in the mountain areas of the riparian belt. Among the many grottoes and caves, several are called up here by their proper names, thus omitting the Thai designation tham for (large) caves as well as (small) grottoes, with reference to the provinces in which they are situated. In Loei Province there are Maholan and Phothisat with 15 grottoes individually named such as Khao Wongkot and Sawanchan. Mukdahan Province has Fa Mue Daeng and Phra. Representative of the caves in Ubon Ratchathani Province are Heo Sin Chai, Muet, and Phra, also known as Phu Ma Nai.

Waterfalls are likely the most popular destination of holiday-makers, especially of local people and increasingly of visitors particularly from Bangkok. Not only are
they places of recreation for the local working population but they offer splendid respite on the itinerary of visitors who are keen to get to know the focal points of the Isan cultural heritage. The number of waterfalls is huge. Hence, the list of the spectacular ones is long.

Owing to its largely mountainous terrain, Loei Province is particularly rich in waterfalls, called nam tok in Thai, in amazing natural settings. They include Wang Kwang, Phen Phop Mai, Phen Phop, Phen Phop, Tham Yai, Than Sawan, Tham So Nuea, Tham So Tai and Sa Anodat in the Phu Kradueng National Park; Huai Phai in the Phu Ruea National Park; Suan Hom and Phlang Din in the Suan Hin Pha Ngam Park; Suan Hom, also known as Santi Thara, and Phiang Din, also known as Wisut Thara, in Nong Hin District; Pla Ba, also known as Tat San, in Phu Ruea District; Kaeng Song Khon in Dan Sai District; and Than Sawan, Khring as well as Tat Hueang in Na Haeo District. Well-known waterfalls of Nong Khai Province include Tham Fun, Chet Si, Phu Tham Phra and Chanaen, also known as Tat Sanaen, in the Phu Wua Wildlife Reserve; and Than Thip as well as Than Thong in Sangkhom District. The Phu Langka National Park straddling the boundary between Nong Khai and Nakhon Phanom provinces has two attractive waterfalls, Tat Kham and Tat Pho. Popular waterfalls in Mukdahan Province are Wang Duean Ha and Phu Tham Phra inside the Mukdahan National Park and Tat Ton in Nong Sung District. In the mountains of Ubon Ratchathani Province, some waterfalls are called “nam tok” in Thai, while others are called “kaeng” in the Isan vernacular. The spectacular ones are Huai Sai Yai, also known as I Khiao, Lamduan, Huai Luang, also known as Tham Bak Teo, Sam Phan Pi, Koeng Mae Phong, Kalao, Soi Sawan, Saeng Chan, Thung Na Mueang, Rak Sai, and Tat Ton.

Forests in headwater areas are of vital importance, as recognized by the government through the establishment of protected areas. Official documents identify mixed, deciduous tree forests in Loei, Nong Khai, Nakhon Phanom, Mukdahan and Amnat Charoen provinces. Dry virgin forests exist in the provinces of Loei, Nong Khai, and Mukdahan. The existence of hardwood tree forests is reported for Nong Khai,
Mukdahan and Ubon Ratchathani Provinces. Pine tree forests are characteristic of high mountain areas in Loei and Ubon Ratchathani provinces. Several kinds of forests are rare, with only one province each having any such forest. Fir tree forests and virgin mountain forests of pine as well as fir trees exist in Loei Province. A rare virgin rain forest and groves of the palm-like plant called prong in Thai [\textit{Cycas circinalis} (Cycadeae)] are found in Nong Khai Province. Other types of rare mountain forests are the crag forest and the stunted hardwood forest [\textit{pa teng rang khrae}] of Mukdahan Province. Likely the last remaining wetland forests are found in the downstream basin and flood plain of the Songkhram River, in Nong Khai and Nakhon Phanom provinces. One type of wetland forest, called \textit{pa bung} in the Isan vernacular, has trees and other plants which grow and thrive in seasonal marshes adjoining the river and its tributaries. Another type, called \textit{pa than} in the Isan vernacular, has trees and plants germane to low-lying lands with abundant water.

Dense, lush forests of whichever kind have become extremely rare. They have been preserved only in few spots located in Loei Province, in a small mountain range straddling Nong Khai and Nakhon Phanom Provinces, and in the southern, high mountains of Ubon Ratchathani Province. The latter is part of the appropriately called “Emerald Triangle”. This dense and lush virgin forest area straddles the border-triangle of Thailand, Cambodia and Laos.

The biodiversity of naturally growing vegetation in reserves is exemplified by some plants named hereunder. Trees include valuable hardwoods such as daeng [\textit{Xylia xylocarpa} (Leguminosae)], makha mong [\textit{Afzelia xylocarpa}], pradu daeng [\textit{Phyllocarpus septentrionalis}], phayung, the Bombay blackwood [\textit{Dalbergia latifolia} (Leguminosae)] and rosewood [\textit{Dalbergia oliveri}]. At high altitude grow firs [\textit{Abies}] and pines [\textit{Pinus} of the \textit{Pinaceae} and \textit{Coniferae} species]. While bamboo groves are frequent, those with prong, a palm-like plant with handsome feathery leaves [\textit{Cycas circinalis} (Cycadeae)] are rather rare. Prominent among the wild flowering plants are epiphytes, especially a great
varieties of orchids including the rare \textit{Paphiopedilum} and \textit{Sukul} orchids. Grasslands at high altitude have a unique temperate flora such as the millet grass \textit{[Millium efuseum]}.

Terrain, climate and vegetation in protected areas are conducive to the survival of wildlife in great variety. Examples of herbivorous mammals are several species of monkeys including the white-cheeked gibbons and flying lemurs, elephants, black bears, boars, hares, and porcupines. To the group of herbivorous mammals belong numerous species of ungulates such as goat antelopes, bison, barking deer, and mouse-deer or chevrotain. Carnivorous prey animals include tigers and dholes, also known as Asiatic or Malay wild dogs. There are as well protected species of tortoises and turtles. Fowl includes the Siamese fireback pheasant \textit{[Lophura diardi]} and the red jungle fowl \textit{[Gallus gallus]}.

\textbf{Ethnic Diversity}

The lasting effect of large-scale population migration is obvious throughout the riparian belt. Until into recent history, wholesome relocation of entire communities occurred. Such migration was greatly facilitated by the ease of moving across as well as along the Mekong River. To this day, numerous ethnic groups have upheld their ethnic identity. It is apparent, first and most of all, in their colourful attire which livens up their traditional celebrations. For example, in the two provinces of Nakhon Phanom and Mukdahan seven and eight “local tribes”, respectively, are officially recognized. These distinctions reflect the broad variety of ethnic or “tribal” subgroups most of which belong to the very large ethnic group of Thai people in Mainland Southeast Asia, in accordance with anthropological as well as linguistic definitions. Hence, in introducing the various groups, large and small in numbers of people, a distinction is made...
between those who ethnically are Thai and those who belong to other ethnic groups.

Examples of subgroups of ethnic Thai are the descendants of Lao immigrants who hailed from areas on the east bank of the Mekong River and its hinterland in historical realms which constitute the present country of Laos. They include the Phu Thai Dam in Ban Na Panat of Chiang Khan District, Loei Province, who settled there in 1905 and maintained their cultural identity.

The majority of the population of Nakhon Phanom and Mukdahan provinces is identified as Thai Isan, who descended from the population in that territory of the Lan Chang Kingdom which was incorporated into Siam during the reign of King Narai [1656-1688]. The Thai Yon of its Tha Uthen District hailed from Sip Song Phan Na in Yunan, China. From among the Phu Thai, relocated in the Third Reign [1824-1851], after the rebellion of Chao Anuwong, a Lao prince, had been crushed, groups of Phu Thai Dam and Phu Thai Khao were settled in the upland areas of the provinces of Nakhon Phanom, Mukdahan and Sakon Nakhon. The lowland district of Renu Nakhon virtually is a Phu Thai homeland, where traditions have been upheld such as hospitality, customary meals, charm rituals, and communal bonds and practices known as fon ram. This kind of social cohesion is the guiding principle in mutual assistance, labour exchange, and celebrations complete with dancing fon ram. The Thai So are concentrated in the upland area which straddles parts of Phon Sawan District in Nakhon Phanom Province, Dong Luang District of Mukdahan Province, and Kusuman District in neighbouring Sakon Nakhon Province. Around there, the people known as Thai Kaloeng, whose ancestors were of the subgroup named Lao Sang, were settled in the Third Reign [1824-1851]. In close vicinity of Nakhon Phanom Town is the area where the Thai Sak, originally from Wai in Annam, were settled during the reign of King Prasat Thong [1629-1656]. Originally called Pa Hai Sok, it is the present At Samat Sub-district of Mueang District in Nakhon Phanom Province.

A highly diversified group are the Bru, an ethnic group originally speaking a Mon-Khmer language and related to the Hraden whose
ancestors had been taken captives in the areas of Savannakhet, Saravane and Attopeu, east of the Mekong River, in present Laos. Settled in Nakhon Phanom, Mukdahan and Ubon Ratchathani provinces since the Third Reign [1824-1851], they are called Thai Kha, a name rejected by the Bru. It echoes their early status as villeins, from which they were freed through the abolition of slavery in the Fifth Reign [1868-1910]. Subgroups are still referred to as Kha Ya Hoen, Kha Ta Oi, Kha Cheng, Kha Sok and Kha Sap Nan, among others. By and large, the Bru are talented artisans especially in creating sculptures and casting images. The villagers of Pa Ao Sub-district in Mueang District of Ubon Ratchathani Province are descendants of immigrants from the area of Vientiane. To this day, they have enjoyed a high reputation for their skills in manufacturing bronze ware and weaving silk fabric.

As stated in a document published by Thailand’s Office of the National Culture Commission, “all these ethnic groups are fully assimilated and consider themselves Thais.”

**CONVERGENCE OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND STRATEGIC INTERVENTION**

The convergence of local communities’ dedication and governmental policy as well as assistance has facilitated the conservation of the built environment. Several such cases are described above, in the context of information about structures which represent the multifaceted cultural heritage. Four examples are recalled here, in brief, to highlight the standing commitment to conservation and restoration of historical sites. The site of a Buddha Footprint, at the monastery named Wat Phra Phuttha Bat Phu Khwai Ngoen in Chiang Khan District of Loei Province was registered as national heritage in 1935. The Phra That Bang Phuan Chedi, a pagoda of ancient origin in Mueang District of Nong Khai Province was restored in 1976, after it had collapsed. The famous Phra That Phanom Chedi, after which both its monastery and the district are named, located in Nakhon Phanom Province, was resurrected through meticulous reconstruction by 1979, four years after it had collapsed. The Khmer sanctuary of
Prasat Ban Ben in Thung Si Udom District of Ubon Ratchathani Province was preserved, beginning with excavations since 1990.

In line with the emphasis on traits and treasures of the riparian belt of Isan, the foci are on the conservation of the environment, both natural and built, the significance of natural resources, and the protection of biodiversity in the animal as well as plant kingdoms. These foci have, of course, been components of the national development policy. Hence, the establishment of protected areas is one among numerous development strategies. Following are few examples of development ventures geared to ensuring sustainability.

Forestry is supplemented through reforestation. In the Phu Ruea National Park, located in Loei Province, for example, the protection of the natural pine forest is coupled with pine tree reforestation. In the same province, the Phu Ruea Temperate Climate Plant Experimental Station has run a program of testing temperate-climate plants for cultivation under local physical conditions, complemented with demonstration and dissemination. A similar program has been implemented to acclimatize foreign flowering plants by the agricultural station named Suan Kaset Chit Sakon in Mueang District of Amnat Charoen Province. At the village named Mu Ban Pramong Nam Chuet in Tha Bo District of Nong Khai Province, fish rearing of species such as carp and catfish has been practiced at great intensity.

The singularly outstanding infrastructure projects are bridges across the Mekong River. The first bridge linking Thailand with Laos is named Saphan Mitraphap Thai – Lao, the Thai – Lao Friendship Bridge. The 1.2 kilometre long bridge, built with Australian aid, connects the Mueang District of Nong Khai Province with Vientiane. The second bridge across the Mekong River is under construction. It will connect the city of Mukdahan in Thailand with the city of
Savannakhet in Laos.

In line with the strategy to foster rural development at the grass-roots level, named the One Tambon One Product (OTOP) project launched by the Royal Thai Government, examples of such ventures are called up hereunder. At the village named Tham Phaen Yo in Tha Bo District of Nong Khai Province, wrappers are produced for the preparation of the finger-food known as spring rolls. These wrappers or wafers are also indispensable for making other dishes originally of the Vietnamese cuisine and for local specialties such as *naem nueang*, pickled sour-pork.

Villages alongside the downstream section of the Songkhram River, situated in Si Songkhram and Tha Uthen districts of Nakhon Phanom Province, have large proportions of households engaged in fisheries. Processing portions of their catches has a long tradition. One specialty, called *pla daek* in the local vernacular and known as *pla ra* throughout Thailand, is produced from fish cut into pieces, mixed with salt and rice bran, stuffed into a big water jar, topped with a piece of wood, compressed, and left for two to three years to ferment. Another specialty is *pla daek tuang*, a strong-flavoured variant of the widely used essence of salted fish or shrimp, commonly called fish sauce, *nam pla*. Also, *pla som*, a pickled fish condiment resembling caviar, is produced by processing minnow, various small fish that are less than a designated size and, hence, not game fish.

Some village-based industries in Mukdahan Province revolve around the growing of mulberry trees, rearing of silkworms, processing raw materials, and producing downstream products. The fibrous thread produced by the larva is spun into silk yarn. The pupa adds variety to meals. The cocoons are made into artificial flowers. Silk threads are dyed using natural saps extracted from barks, leaves, or fruits of olive and jackfruit trees, of various shrubs, as well as coconut palms.

Some sub-districts such as Pa Thai – Lao Friendship Bridge, Nong Khai – Vientiane

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Ao in Mueang District of Ubon Ratchathani Province seem to have built reputations based on the division of labour by genders. Pa Ao is well known for both its bronze ware and silk and cotton fabric. There like at other such locations in this province, types of fabric are distinguished, as follows: *pha sin*, sarong-like skirts, of the *mai ngoen kum, muk, mup mao, katio*, and *mud mee* varieties, *pha poeng, pha hom, pha thung,* and *pha khao ma.* Availing of an abundance of raw material, most households at Tha Khong Lek in the province’s Warin Chamrap District have traditionally been engaged in making pottery by mixing sticky clay from the Mun River Bed with paddy husk.

Whatever development efforts have been launched, they could yield results only if water was reliably available. Recognizing its necessity, dams were constructed and reservoirs created. The largest such dam and reservoir, by far, is the Sirindhorn Dam, named after H.R.H. Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, which bars the Lam Dom Noi River and created the Sirindhorn Lake, straddling parts of the Sirindhorn, Phibun Mangsahan and Buntharik districts in Ubon Ratchathani Province.

Looking north from this topographical point, numerous reservoirs were put in place, typically in upland areas of the provinces located along the Mekong River. Moving upstream, province-by-province, examples of such water reservoirs, named *Ang Kep Nam* in Thai, are called up. Examples from Ubon Ratchathani Province are the reservoirs of Huai Tham Khae, Nong Chang Yai and Nong Hi. Situated in Amnat Charoen Province are Phuttha Uthayan, Huai Pho, Huai Si Tho, Nong Baen, and Huai Suan Pha. Those in Mukdahan Province include Huai Tha, Huai Chino, Huai Muk, and Huai Khi Lek. Examples from Nakhon Phanom Province are Huai Sap, Nong Loeng, Chai Wan Yai, Nong Sang Yai, Nong Han, Som Hong, Nong Yat, and Huai Hin Chanaen. In Nong Khai Province are the reservoirs of Bua Phuan as well as Nam Pham, and in Loei Province is the one named Suai.
of numerous creeks, rivulets, and rivers, known as lam nam, lam, huai lam, or huai in Thai. By their sheer number, they seem to hold great potential as a reliable water resource. The Mun River rises in the far west, together with several larger tributaries such as Choeng Krai, Takhong, San Phet, and Chakarat in Nakhon Ratchasima Province. Along the course of the Mun River, numerous tributaries empty into the main stream. They include such major ones as Plai Mat, Chi, which is shorter than a longer river of the same name to the north, Sathaet, Phang Chu, and Nang Ron in Buri Ram Province; Phlapphla, Thap Than, Phai, and Lam Phok in Surin Province; and Samran, Tha, Siao, Hung, Kha Yung, and Chi, the longer river of the two with the same name, in Si Sa Ket Province. Yet the large areas of the two plains, Thung Samrit in the west and Thung Kula Rong Hai in the east, are seasonally semi-arid lands.

**Antiquity Grid : Conservation of the Built Environment**

Isan Southern Plateau

**Topographical Orientation**

The southern plateau of Isan together with its surrounding mountains is almost identical with the Mun River Basin, except for its downstream section, where it borders the Mekong River. By present administrative units, the southern plateau comprises, from west to east as the Mun River flows, of the provinces of Nakhon Ratchasima, Buri Ram, Surin and Si Sa Ket. Its area is larger than the country of Bhutan, and substantially larger than Switzerland. In terms of physical geography, the southern plateau of Isan is slanting from high mountain ranges in the west, southwest and south toward the Mekong River in the east, at the average rate of one metre per kilometre.

The Phang Hoei Mountain Range in the west, the San Kamphaeng Mountain Range in the southwest, and the Dong Rak Mountain Range in the south are the headwater areas of numerous creeks, rivulets, and rivers, known as lam nam, lam, huai lam, or huai in Thai. By their sheer number, they seem to hold great potential as a reliable water resource. The Mun River rises in the far west, together with several larger tributaries such as Choeng Krai, Takhong, San Phet, and Chakarat in Nakhon Ratchasima Province. Along the course of the Mun River, numerous tributaries empty into the main stream. They include such major ones as Plai Mat, Chi, which is shorter than a longer river of the same name to the north, Sathaet, Phang Chu, and Nang Ron in Buri Ram Province; Phlapphla, Thap Than, Phai, and Lam Phok in Surin Province; and Samran, Tha, Siao, Hung, Kha Yung, and Chi, the longer river of the two with the same name, in Si Sa Ket Province. Yet the large areas of the two plains, Thung Samrit in the west and Thung Kula Rong Hai in the east, are seasonally semi-arid lands.
The cause of the ensuing environmental deterioration over the centuries is large-scale deforestation in historical times, to lasting detrimental effect. As evident from meteorological records for the past 125 years, at fearsome regularity one disastrous flooding and one devastating drought used to occur at five-year intervals. The clustering of monuments of antiquity holds both the core explanation of existing conditions and the potential for further improvement, in the course of ongoing development efforts.

**Prehistory**

Fossils of animals and plants give evidence of early life on the southern plateau. Actinopterigian fossils discovered in grey sandstone at a site of Nakhon Ratchasima Province, in 1992, show fish with hard bones and stemmed fins, 34.5 centimetres long and 12 centimetres wide, with diamond-shaped scales and asymmetrical tail. They are dated as of the Early Jurassic Period (195–177 million years ago). It is assumed that these fish fossils are about 190 million years old. In the same province, elephantine fossils were discovered in a sand pit on the bank of the Mun River. They include bones, teeth and tusks ascribed to four-tusk elephants in the Gomphotherium genus, to four-tusk elephants in the Stegolophodon genus, and two-tusk elephants in the Stegedon genus. These fossils are dated as of the Late Middle Miocene Period (150–130 million years ago). Also in this province, at a site in Mueang District, more than 10,000 pieces of petrified wood were excavated at a depth of eight metres. Their size reaches from pieces as small as pebbles to some large ones which are longer than one metre. They are assumed to

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1 All historical data, i.e. years and centuries, refer to the chronology of the Western Calendar.
be between one and 20 million years old. This site has been declared a nature reserve, named *Uthayan Mai Klai Pen Hin*.

Evidence of prehistoric settlements was found in Nakhon Ratchasima and Buri Ram provinces. At a site in Sikhio District of Nakhon Ratchasima Province which is littered with sandstone rocks, and where the monastery named Wat Khao Chan Ngam of Ban Loet Sawat is situated, pictographs tell of human habitat some 3,000 to 4,000 years ago. Two sets are distinguished, one showing human figures hunting animals, painted in red, and another one of hardly discernable drawings. One particular sandstone rock has pictographs which are four metres high and show human as well as animal figures. Inside the Khao Chan Ngam Cave, pictographs cover the length of 2.2 metres, drawn between four and five metres above the ground. Also in Nakhon Ratchasima Province, in its Non Sung District, is the Ban Prasat Ancient Culture Site. It is considered second only to the Ban Chiang Prehistoric Site, situated in Udon Thani Province of Isan.

At Ban Prasat, three excavation sites yielded evidence of continuity of human habitat, from prehistoric to Dvaravati and, then, Khmer civilizations. The earliest community existed about 3,000 years ago. To date, it is the oldest settlement discovered in the south of Isan. Findings at 5.5-metre depth include female human...
skeletons only, owing to the objects deposited in the graves, which include earthenware, jewelry such as necklaces made of mollusc shells, beads, bronze rings, bronze bangles, bronze brooches, and burial paraphernalia for the dead, as well as utensils. Of special significance are pieces of red band-ceramic pottery dated as more than 3,000 years old, including the first and oldest pots with a trumpet-shaped opening, and some black-patterned ceramics made 2,500 years ago. At the Phimai Historical Park, famous for its Khmer antiquities, random excavations yielded Neolithic pottery, jewellery and shell ornaments. Traces of a prospering Bronze Age community were found at Ban Mueang Pha in Buri Ram Province. The variety of objects includes human skeletons, animal bones, mollusc shells, and artefacts such as plain and painted pottery, some in the shape of animal figurines, utensils made from stone and quartz, ornaments, as well as spear-tips and axe-blades made from iron. Experts concluded that buffaloes had been reared and probably used to work the land.
Monuments and Artefacts Traced to Early History: Chenla and Dvaravati Periods from the 7th Century Onward

There are indications that early in history the southern plateau of Isan saw the encounter, acculturation and assimilation of ethnic groups which, to use a befitting concept of social anthropology, upheld their very own “little traditions” while performing vital roles in shaping successive “great traditions”.

The earliest documented testimony is a set of inscriptions in Pallawa characters and Sanskrit language which record the feats of King Chitrasen of Chenla, a realm in the eastern part of Mainland Southeast Asia. The inscription found in Buri Ram Province, still in pristine condition, dates from the 7th century. It also refers to King Mahenthrawarman [607 – 616] of the “Lower Khmer Realm”, which is the area south of the Dong Rak Mountain Range. The inscriptions found in the provinces of Surin and Si Sa Ket are now preserved at the National Museum in Bangkok. They record that the ancient Khmer towns in the wild forests of Isan, i.e. to the north of the Dong Rak Mountain Range, were considered the “Upper Khmer Realm”. Its major towns named in the inscriptions are Khukhan (now Khukhan District, Si Sa Ket Province) and Sangha (now Sangkha District, Surin Province).

By then, they were under the rule of the Chenla Kingdom, with its centre to the east of the Mekong River.

Remains of the Dvaravati Period are concentrated at sites in present Nakhon Ratchasima Province, with few sites in Buri Ram and one site in Surin provinces. Phimai in Nakhon Ratchasima Province, evidently the site of human habitat in prehistoric time, was one of the early Dvaravati towns, around the 3rd to 4th centuries and remained a focal point of
Mahayana Buddhism until the 10\textsuperscript{th} century. By the 7\textsuperscript{th} century, the town named Sema gained importance. Its ruins are located in present Sung Noen District. Although only ramparts and moats are still visible in part, which encompass an oval area some two kilometres long and 1.5 kilometres wide, inside are several mounds of collapsed brick, laterite and sandstone structures, some of them excavated, and also some ponds. The sheer size of the ancient site suggests that Sema was a regional centre, strategically situated in the land corridor between the central plain of the Chao Phraya River and Isan. In its surrounding area are remnants of monuments built of laterite and sandstone. Excavations yielded many artefacts. The most significant artefacts are a reclining Buddha statue and an ancient Dharma Wheel. They are preserved, together with other artefacts, at the nearby monastery named Wat Thammachak Semaram. The reclining pink sandstone Buddha image is the largest and oldest of its kind in Thailand. It was created around the year 650 by cutting, assembling and sculpting large blocks of red sandstone, to the length of 13.3 metres and the height of 2.8 metres. The Dharma Wheel was sculpted from one large piece of sandstone rock. It is engraved with the symbols of the “Lord of the Forest”, “phanasabodi” in Thai, including the Bo Tree, Banyan Tree and Fig Tree, trees that produce fruit without flowering. Other Dvaravati artefacts include a bronze Buddha image cast in a lost-wax mould, quartz beads, ornaments, and band-ceramic pottery pieces. All these items are preserved at the Phimai National Museum. Fragmented boundary markers, bai sema, dot the surrounding area.

Excavations at the Ban Prasat Archaeological Site in the province’s Non Sung District yielded Buddha images from one and the same period of the Dvaravati culture as well as women’s ornaments and decorative items of a sanctuary named “Ku Thara Prasat”. All these...
More Dvaravati artefacts were found in Buri Ram Province. They include a two-metre high statue made of laterite and a bronze-cast image, both of which are housed in the monastery named Wat Hong, also known as Wat Sisa Raet, in Phutthaisong District. This is the location of an ancient town, founded in the Dvaravati Period and in existence until the end of Khmer rule. On the ground of the monastery named Wat Khao Angkhan in Chaloem Phra Kiat District are many Dvaravati sandstone boundary markers, *bai sema*. Among the artefacts found at the prehistoric site of Ban Mueang Phai is one large-size *bai sema*, which is thought to belong to an ancient, dilapidated Buddhist temple.

The site of Mueang Phra Thai Saman, also known as Ku Phra Thai, in Surin Province shows traces of an ancient town surrounded by two walls and moats. The remains of four ancient communities outside the walls are believed to pre-date the founding of that town.

**MONUMENTS AND ARTEFACTS TRACED TO THE 7TH UNTIL 13TH CENTURIES: EXAMPLES OF KHMER STYLES**

In history, one of the great territorial expansions in Mainland Southeast Asia had been driven by Khmer rulers based in the area around the Tonle Sap Lake, in present Cambodia. Their advances in establishing strategic outposts towards upstream areas of the Mekong River Basin, the Tanao Si Mountain Range in the West and the Upper Peninsula are manifest in numerous ancient monuments. Their highest concentration exists on the southern plateau of Isan. There, some one hundred ancient sites are known, to date. In one of the four provinces, Buri Ram, 60 sites are listed. Archaeological as well as historical research, and ensuing large-scale restoration works trace the Khmer presence over a period of seven centuries, between the early 7th and late 13th centuries. One salient finding of scholarly work explains the complexity of most
ancient Khmer monuments, as they appear especially after restoration through anastylosis of ruins, many of which had dilapidated to heaps of fragments, since the faltering of the Khmer Empire under the onslaught by the Thai Ayutthaya Kingdom, in the 14th century. Characteristically, the existing ancient sites had evolved through a prolonged process of building which resulted in the incorporation of various styles of Khmer architecture and art. It is for this reason that a chronological approach is adopted in presenting examples from among the many ancient monuments.

By far most ancient sites with Khmer monuments are sanctuaries called Prasat, on account of their characteristic main edifices shaped like towers, since antiquity and

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Pre-Angkor 6th to late 8th Century A.D.
Pre-Angkor 6th to late 8th Century A.D.

- Phanom Da 550 – 600
- Sambor Phrea Kuk 600 – 660 (Sombo Phrai Kuk)
- Angkor Period 802 – 1432 A.D.
- Kulen 802 – 877
- Preah Ko 877 – 960 (Phra Kho)
- Bakheng 890 – 960 (Phrai Khamen)
- Koh Ker 928 – 941 (Ko Kae)
- Preah Rup 945 – 968 (Prae Rup)
- Kleang 945 – 1010 (Khlang)
- Banteay Srei 950 – 1001 (Bantai Si)
- Baphuon 1010 – 1113 (Ba Puan)
- Angkor Wat 1113 – 1200 (Nakhon Wat)
- Bayon 1181 – 1300

3 Prasat literally is a ‘tower’, hence, ‘a sanctuary in the form of a tower’, a tower-sanctuary; the word is a variant of ‘prasada’, the term for a terraced pyramid temple typical of South India [Michael Freeman & Roger Warner, Angkor. The Hidden Glories. Edited and designed by David Larkin. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990, p. 255]. In Thailand, a prasat is an edifice erected on high foundation and approached by means of steps; it has between one and six towers; it may, therefore, be described as a turreted palace. Any individual tower of a prasat is likened, in Thai language, to a ‘prang’, a dome-like structure such as a stupa erected as a memorial of an event or a spot revered by Buddhists.
until this day. By and large, this designation precedes the proper name of any such sanctuary and edifice. It is, therefore, retained in presenting the selected monuments, in chronological order since the earliest evidence of their foundation and first construction.

**MONUMENTS AND ARTEFACTS TRACED TO THE 7TH CENTURY ONWARD**:

**SAMBOR PHREA KUK, SOMBO PHRAI KUK, AND PHREA KO PHRA KHO STYLES**

The oldest Khmer sanctuary in Isan as well as in Thailand is Prasat Phumi Pon, located in Sangkha District of Surin Province. It consists of four ancient structures, three built of brick and one of laterite, in different periods. Its largest and tallest central ‘tower’ and the one situated to its north were built of brick in the style defined, in internationally adopted nomenclature, as Sambor Phrea Kuk, in the first half of the 7th century. They are the very oldest such monuments. Another small tower, resembling the Preah Ko style, was built of brick probably late in the 9th century, and one more built of laterite was added, probably latest in the 11th century, as inscriptions suggest. Prasat Phumi Pon was designed as a Hindu sanctuary. Its original stone inscriptions dating from the 7th to 11th centuries are preserved at the Surin National Museum. Located in the same province is Prasat Ban Beng, the only other very old Hindu sanctuary built in the Sambor Phrea Kuk style, also in the first half of the 7th century.

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4 Style designations rendered in italics feature the corresponding transliteration of the Thai nomenclature, in as far as they vary from the internationally adopted nomenclature based on the transliteration of the Khmer nomenclature.

5 During the reign of King Mahenthavarman [607 - 616].

6 During the reign of King Indravarman II [877 - 889].

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The forest of Khao Yai
Prasat Phanomwan has a long history of building its various edifices, spanning some 300 years. Construction of this sanctuary began in the Kulen Period[^7] which is characteristic of the first to the third quarter of the 9th century. Its entrance structures date from the transition period of the Preah Ko to the Bakhen[^8] style, at the end of the 9th century. They form the oldest part of the monument, as it exists today. Most structures reflect the style of the transition period from the Kleang to the Baphuon[^9] style. While almost all carved lintels of the structures were moved to the archaeological collection attached to the Prasat Phimai Sanctuary or the National Museum in Bangkok, one fine, carved lintel is still in place above the north entrance of the main sanctuary. The large towers of the prasat with doorways, known as gopura in Sanskrit and sum pratu in Thai, and ledges represent pure Baphuon Style[^10]. The central tower is an edifice with a vestibule leading to a hall, the inner sanctum, and a tapering upper part topped by an artistic spire. It is known as mandapa in Sanskrit and called mondop in Thai. The inner wall of the sanctuary is built of sandstone and its outer wall of laterite. At a hillside nearby,
named *noen oraphim* in Thai, is the characteristic pond, named *saphleng* in Thai. One building of the *prasat* called *prang noi* houses a large Buddha image sculpted of sandstone, indicating the transformation of the erstwhile Hindu into a Buddhist sanctuary, located in present Mueang District of Nakhon Ratchasima Province.

Archaeological evidence underscores that construction of the Hindu sanctuary remained unfinished. A local legend relates the competitive construction of the twin sanctuaries of Phimai and Phanomwan, between teams of women and men. The women built Prasat Phimai, while the men built Prasat Phanomwan. The outcome explains the variation in degree of completion, with the Prasat Phanomwan unfinished. It had been agreed beforehand that upon completion of construction work, a hot-air-borne lantern (as still popular nowadays in Isan, called *yi pheng*, and in northern Thailand, called *yi peng*) would be floated to send the agreed signal. Fearsome of losing out, the women let their balloon rise and float before they had finished the construction of Prasat Phimai. On sighting the lantern signalling their woman competitors’ accomplishment, the men felt despondent and abandoned their work.

**MONUMENTS AND ARTEFACTS TRACED TO THE 9TH CENTURY ONWARD:**

*Preah Ko* *Phrai Khao, Bakheng,*

*Kleang *Khlang, Preah Rup *

*Prae Rup,*

*Banteay Srei *Bantai Si,* and

*Baphuon *Ba Puan* Styles

The Mueang Tam Sanctuary is a complex whose construction was started in the last quarter of the 9th century ¹¹, in the style of the Preah Ko Period. The Hindu sanctuary proper, the *prasat* with five towers, *prang*, built of brick on a single laterite base in the middle of the complex, as well as the large *barai* or reservoir with its embankment and sluice gates built of laterite, to its north, date from this period. Most figurative sculptures represent themes of the Hindu cosmology. Sandstone lintels show images of Indra riding the elephant named

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¹¹ During the reign of King Indravarman II [877 - 889].
Erawan and of Shiva with Uma Haesuan seated on his knees. Work was completed more than one hundred years later\textsuperscript{12}, in the period known as the transition from the Kleang to the Banteay Srei style, in Thai also referred to as a “\textit{papon}”, mixed style, not to be confused with the Baphuon Period, known in Thai as Ba Puan. The inner wall was built from sandstone in a square shape, with one long, narrow corridor and large ponds in the four corners. The ponds were enclosed with low-rise kerbs and downward steps constructed of sandstone. Sculpted cassia blossoms decorate the sandstone structures. The outer wall was built of laterite. Well-restored as it appears today, the elegant ensemble of Prasat Mueang Tam presents the result of blending different styles over a period of about 130 years. It is located in Prakhon Chai District of Buri Ram Province.

Upon its marvellous restoration, the grand and majestic ancient Khmer monument of Prasat Phanom Rung crowns the southern ridge of an extinct volcano, a big, \textit{rung} in Khmer, mountain, \textit{phanom} in Khmer. Earliest evidence of its construction dates from its oldest, existing structures of two small brick

\textsuperscript{12} During the reigns of King Jayavarman V [968 - 1001] and King Jayaviravarman [1002 - 1011].
sanctuaries near the main tower\textsuperscript{13} whose architectural features reflect the overlapping stylistic periods known as Preah Ko and Bakheng (both late 9\textsuperscript{th} to mid-10\textsuperscript{th} centuries), Preah Rup (mid-10\textsuperscript{th} century), and Banteay Srei as well as Kleang (both second half 10\textsuperscript{th} century). Founded as a Hindu sanctuary, it was laid out as a heavenly abode of Shiva. Prang Noi, a small square chapel in pink sandstone, was built in the style of the transition period from the Kleang to the Baphuon\textsuperscript{14} style (early 11\textsuperscript{th} century). Its four sides have sculpted decorations in the Kleang style. Other structures built of laterite including the \textit{Phlapphla Plueang Khrueang}, commonly called the White Elephant Stables, were likely added in the 11\textsuperscript{th} century. Design and architecture of the central tower, the main chapel called \textit{prang prathan} in Thai, were executed in the style characteristic of the early Baphuon Period\textsuperscript{15} (early 12\textsuperscript{th} century). Presumably the two laterite buildings to the left and right of the main entrance

\textsuperscript{13} During the reign of King Rajendravarman III [944 - 968].
\textsuperscript{14} During the reign of King Suryavarman I [1001 - 1050].
\textsuperscript{15} During the reign of King Dharanindravarman I [1107 - 1113].
of the sanctuary, in their rough appearance contrasting with that of the refined main temple edifice, its prang, were built as structures to house the library, known as bannalai. The staircase with its segmentation by three terraces or bridges, saphan nakharaj, of diminishing size in upward direction, each with balustrades flanked by mythical serpents, naga, as well as the rectangular perimeter, rabiang chan nok, were constructed in the style named after its most famous monumental example, Angkor Wat\textsuperscript{16} (12\textsuperscript{th} century). Additions in this style were resumed in the late decades of the 12\textsuperscript{th} and into the early decades of the 13\textsuperscript{th} century\textsuperscript{17}, when King Jayavarman VII converted to Buddhism and had Hindu sanctuaries consecrated as sanctuaries of the Mahayana Buddhism tenet. The magnificently restored Prasat Phanom Rung, with a host of splendid sandstone sculptures such as the famous Narai Lintel, is located in Chaloem Phra Kiat District of Buri Ram Province.

The monument named Prasat Sa Kamphaeng Yai in Uthumphon Phisai District of Si Sa Ket Province is one of the best examples of the

\textsuperscript{16} During the reign of King Suryavarman II [1112 - 1150].

\textsuperscript{17} During the reign of King Jayavarman VII [1181 - 1220].
transformation which numerous ancient sanctuaries have undergone, over the centuries. The present Buddhist monastery named Wat Sa Kamphaeng Yai is situated right next to the ancient sanctuary. Its large site, the largest in the area dotted with such ancient monuments, might be the result of repeated modifications. The construction of originally six towers points to the architectural style of the Preah Ko Period\(^{18}\) (late 9\(^{th}\) to early 10\(^{th}\) centuries) as the time when the foundation of the sanctuary was laid and the six towers were first built. Established as a Hindu sanctuary, it was constructed by erecting three of the six towers on a single terrace built of sandstone and laterite. Early on, it was probably dedicated to Brahma, before becoming a Shiva sanctuary. The existing central tower was built of sandstone combined with brick, while the three other existing towers, those flanking the central tower, *prasat prathan*, and the existing fourth tower, one of the erstwhile other three towers, were built solely of brick. Two rectangular edifices, built of brick and likely used as living-quarter and storehouse were presum-ably added in the Kleang Period\(^{19}\) (early 11\(^{th}\) century). Structural components hewn of sandstone include frontons or pediments, lintels, colonettes and balustrades of the four doorways of each tower, called *gopura* in Sanskrit and *sum pratu* in Thai. Sculptures on sandstone include a pediment on one rectangular building showing Narai Banthomsin and another pediment on the second rectangular building showing Shiva with Uma. Some lintels depict images of Brahma or Shiva. Excavations yielded many artefacts such as intricately carved sandstone lintels; stone inscriptions relating details of construction, reference to the area from which resources were drawn, and the number of slave workers required; and Buddha images such as the ones in meditation posture and seated under a canopy of Naga heads; and some fired-clay and bronze artwork. The Buddha images, particularly the statue of the Buddha seated under a canopy of Naga heads sculpted from sandstone,

\(^{18}\) During the reigns of the kings Indravarman II [877 - 889], Yasovarman I [889 - 910], Harshavarman I [910 - 923] and Isanavarman II [923 - 928].

\(^{19}\) During the reign of King Jayaviravarman [1002 - 1011].
render strong evidence that the site was transformed into a Mahayana Buddhist sanctuary\textsuperscript{20}, around the turn of the 13\textsuperscript{th} century.

Although not situated in Thailand’s territory, mention is made here of the ancient Hindu sanctuary named Prasat Phra Vihan, situated on the ridge of a promontory that is cut in half by the boundary of Thailand and Cambodia. The sanctuary proper sits on top of a high, steep cliff. In history and to this day, the Prasat Phra Vihan, known as Khao Phra Vihan in Thai, has been accessible only by ascending to it through the northern foothills and on the sloping mountain ridge. While the ancient sanctuary is situated in Cambodia, its access is routed through Kantharalak District of Thailand’s Si Sa Ket Province. The foundation of Prasat Phra Vihan dates back to the period of transition from the Preah Ko to Bakheng\textsuperscript{21} styles (turn of the 10\textsuperscript{th} century). Wholesome construction was carried out in the Kleang\textsuperscript{22} style, at its beginning, and employing elements of the Baphuon style, in reaching completion.

Along the route and at high altitude, a sculpted wall spot of the cliff named Pha Mo I Daeng, situated in Thailand, features three human-like figures. Scholars interpreted these images as Shiva flanked by two female deities or celestial maidens. They might have been created by craftsmen who camped there, near the site where they worked on the construction of Prasat Phra Vihan. It probably was in the early construction phase of the Khao Phra Vihan sanctuary that the chapel named after the Pha Mo I Daeng was built, which houses an image of the Buddha seated under a canopy of serpent heads, called \textit{Phra Nak Prok} in Thai, and where the oldest Khmer style bas-relief in Thailand was found.

\textsuperscript{20} During the reign of King Jayavarman VII [1181 - 1220].
\textsuperscript{21} During the reign of King Yasovarman I [889 - 910].
\textsuperscript{22} During the reigns of the kings Jayaviravarman [1002 - 1011] and Suryavarman I [1001-1050].
The Prasat Tamnak Sai, also known as Prasat Tham Chan, in Khukhan District of Si Sa Ket Province seems to be of enigmatic origin. Its construction probably began in the Koh Ker Period\(^2\) (first half of the 10\(^{th}\) century), owing to its architectural style. It was built of brick as a single, square-shaped tower based on a platform built of laterite, and dedicated to Brahma. In its perimeter, a sandstone image of Brahma was found. A sandstone lintel of the tower shows Narai Banthomsin. Both sculptures are preserved in the Phimai National Museum. Still in place is a pair of lions which guard the entrance and the doorway, *gopura*, leading to the tower. All these structures were built of sandstone. The ensemble of components showing different styles, as it appears today, is dated as of the 11\(^{th}\) century.

In the far west of the southern plateau, in Sung Noen District of Nakhon Ratchasima Province, are the two ancient sites of the Dvaravati city named Sema and of the Khmer city named Khorakhapura. Sema sank into oblivion after the Khmer took control of the area and established Khorakhapura as their regional centre. In the second half of the 17\(^{th}\) century, these ancient cities, by then deserted, lent their names to the new regional centre which was established somewhat farther to the east, under the alternative names of Khorat and Nakhon Ratchasima.

Among the remains of sanctuaries in the ancient Khmer city of Khorakhapura, in Thai known as *Mueang Khorat Kao*, the Hindu sanctuary named Prasat Noen Ku is the oldest. What remained are one of likely five towers, of square shape and built of brick on a high platform constructed of sandstone. The tower is flanked by annexes which resemble ancient library buildings. Excavations in 1991-1992 yielded many artefacts, including images of Phra Isuan or Shiva and of celestial maidens. Lintel discovered in the dig were taken to the Phimai National Museum for safekeeping.

\(^{2}\)During the reign of King Jayavarman IV [928 - 941].
The sanctuary has two gateways and is surrounded by a low wall built of sandstone, called kamphaeng kaeo in Thai. Some design features reflect the Koh Ker Style (second quarter of the 10th century), while the overall architectural style is considered to represent the Preah Rup style (third quarter of the 10th century).

Nearly as old as Prasat Noen Ku is another Hindu sanctuary in the ancient city of Khorakhapura which is known as Prasat Mueang Khaek. Compared to the somewhat older sanctuary, Prasat Mueang Khaek is a large site of square lay-out with monuments built of brick and sandstone. Its central tower, called prasat prathan in Thai, with two library buildings, called bannalai, doorways known as gopura, terraces enclosed by balustrades, stairs, small towers built of brick, all these structures surrounded by a low wall, called kamphaeng kaeo, and ponds were built in the Preah Rup Style (third quarter 10th century), the same style as that of Prasat Noen Ku. Various sculptures discovered during excavations in the years 1959 and 1990-1991, including an image of Brahma, confirmed that Prasat Mueang Khaek was a Hindu sanctuary, originally dedicated to Brahma. All precious artefacts are preserved at the Phimai National Museum.

The ancient Mueang Sema has, in addition to its Dvaravati heritage, some remains of Khmer monuments built of laterite and sandstone. Comparatively best preserved is the central edifice of a Hindu sanctuary called Prasat It Klang. As its name indicates, it was built of brick as the core tower of a quincunx, in the Preah Rup Style (third quarter of the 10th century).

MONUMENTS AND ARTEFACTS TRACED TO THE 10TH CENTURY ONWARD:
PREAH RUP * PRAE RUP STYLE

The earliest among the existing sites in Isan with remains of a Khmer sanctuary laid out in a quincunx seems to be Prasat Mueang Thi in

24 During the reign of King Jayavarman IV [928 - 941].
25 During the reign of King Rajendravarman III [944 - 968].
26 During the reign of King Rajendravarman III [944 - 968].
27 During the reign of King Rajendravarman III [944 - 968].
Mueang District of Surin Province. It is for this type of layout that it has been likened to the much better preserved Prasat Si Khoraphum, at close distance within the same province. The ruins of Prasat Mueang Thi appear to stand on raised ground, which itself is the remnant of the high platform or terrace constructed of laterite, now largely dilapidated. Of its originally five, square-shaped towers, prang, built of brick on a single base, three remain, including the central tower. The sanctuary was constructed in the Preah Rup\textsuperscript{28} style (early 11\textsuperscript{th} century) and dedicated to Brahma. Its central tower is the tallest and has a stairway on each side reaching to its pediment. Its main and upper structure has five reduced storeys. It resembles Mount Meru of the Hindu cosmology.

An example of pragmatic restoration worth calling up is the erstwhile sanctuary now known as Prasat Tapiang Tia in Lamduan District of Surin Province. It was originally designed as a Hindu sanctuary with the layout of a quincunx, examples of which are rare in Isan. Built of brick, probably in the Preah Rup\textsuperscript{29} style (early 11\textsuperscript{th} century),

\textsuperscript{28} During the reign of King Suryavarman I [1001-1050].

\textsuperscript{29} Presumably during the reign of King Suryavarman I [1001-1050].
its five towers, prang, were modified several hundred years later. One might assume that the upper sections of the towers were dilapidated, by then, or else that construction had not been completed, in the first instance. Local ingenious craftsmen maintained the square-shaped lower structures and capped the short (tia in Thai) lower sections of the towers with dome-shaped roofs. The result has been called, to this day, bua tum owing to the semblance of budding lotus. To top this metamorphosis, the Buddhist sanctuary is categorized somewhat fancily as built in the “Lao Style”.

**MONUMENTS AND ARTEFACTS TRACED TO THE 10th CENTURY ONWARD:**

* KLEANG * KHLANG, BAPHUON * BA PUA, AND ANGKOR WAT * NAKHON WAT STYLES

Among the Khmer sanctuaries erected in plains, the Prasat Phimai equals Prasat Phanom Rung on a mountain ridge in terms of splendour and grandeur. Prasat Phimai excelled, indeed, all other such monuments found in Isan with regard to its significance for the ancient Khmer Empire. A Royal Road linked Prasat Phimai to the capital city, Angkor, following a virtually straight line. From Prasat Phimai, such roads extended farther toward the northwest, west and southwest connecting to other such prasat. Along these roads smaller prasat were built.

As visible to this day, Prasat Phimai was laid out in rectangular shape, surrounded by walls and moats. The gates on each side were, like the walls, built of laterite. In the centre stands the Prasat Phimai, a tower complex constructed of white sandstone. As evident upon its painstaking restoration, the ancient regional seat of power was one of the magnificent Khmer sanctuaries. Construction of the core edifice, called prasat prathan in Thai, began late in
the Kleang Period and progressed throughout the Baphuon Period\textsuperscript{30}, as recorded in stone inscriptions and highly visible from the architectural style of its tower. A ledge or inner wall surrounds the central section. Two small towers or prang are in front of the main tower, prasat prathan, which is intricately designed and elaborately decorated. Most lintels recount episodes from Hindu cosmology. The outer section has stairs flanked by lions leading up to the Naga Bridge, a terrace with a balustrade flanked by mythical serpents which is linked to the gateway, gopura, into the inner sanctum. There also are paired buildings and five ponds, four of them in the corners of the inner area. All these structures are encompassed by the wall built of laterite and measuring 565 by 1,030 metres.

Beyond it, in the outer area, some more sacrosanct edifices are situated. They include the boat-landing named Tha Nang Sa Phom, the hermitage called Kudi Ruesi as well as the hospital and infirmary, known as arokhayasala in Sanskrit and arokhayasan in Thai. This ancient health care and medical treatment facility is one of altogether 104 such centres established by royal command of King Jayavarman VII, late in the 12\textsuperscript{th} century and operating during his own as well as his direct descendants’ reigns\textsuperscript{31}. They were the manifested concern of King Jayavarman VII about his subjects’ physical well-being, inspired by the ruler’s conversion to Mahayana Buddhism, and symbolized by the compassionate bodhisatva known as Avalokiteshvara.

The transformation of the Hindu sanctuary into a Buddhist sanctuary entailed the addition of structures as well as modification of existing structures. This explains the architectural features of the Angkor Period\textsuperscript{32} (12\textsuperscript{th} century), although it had been made obsolete in the very centre of Khmer might through its conquest and pillage by the victorious Cham in 1177. Upon defeating the

\textsuperscript{30} Mainly during the reigns of the kings Surayavarman I [1002 - 1050], Jayavarman VI [1080 - 1107] and Dharanindravarman I [1107 - 1113].

\textsuperscript{31} During the reigns of the kings Jayavarman VII [1181-1220], Indravarman II [1220 - 1243], Jayavarman VIII [1243 - 1295], Indravarman III [1295 - 1308], and Indrajayavarman [1308 - 1327].

\textsuperscript{32} Dating from the reign of King Suryavarman II [1113 - 1150].
occupants in 1181 and ascending to the throne, King Jayavarman VII inspired the Bayon Period which is synonymous with his reign. Yet there is no evidence at the Prasat Phimai of any Bayon architectural style. The main tower complex, *prasat prathan*, was transformed into a Mahayana Buddhism sanctuary and dedicated to the *Vimaya Buddha*. The lintel above the portal of the inner doorway portrays images of Mahayana Buddhism. A very fine statue of King Jayavarman VII was discovered in one of two small towers or *prang*. It was built of laterite and called *Prang Prommathat*, with reference to the ruler’s image placed therein. Now it is preserved at the National Museum in Bangkok. The other small tower, known as *Prang Hin Daeng*, owing to its red sandstone structure, was built earlier as the library building of the Hindu sanctuary. The above changes inside the sanctuary and the building of such structures as the city wall, complete with city gates, among them the most important southern gate as it connected to the Royal Road from Angkor leading straight into the sanctuary, gave the ancient site a different appearance. This explains why the ancient ensemble with the sanctuary of Prasat Phimai at its centre has been viewed as one of the best examples of classical Khmer architecture by the end of the 11th century, in the style of Angkor, which has reference to the span of time between 802 and 1453.

Another such ancient Hindu sanctuary was Prasat Ban Phlai. It is located in Prasat District of Surin Province. Constructed in the Kleang 33 style (second half 10th of the century) on a single platform or terrace, its three towers, *prang*, were built of brick, with the central tower housing a *Shiva Lingam*. It is surrounded by a moat. Although precious lintels, once decorating the towers, were missing, some other artefacts are preserved at the Phimai National Museum.

A small Hindu sanctuary with three towers, *prang*, built of brick on one laterite base, is located in Non Din Daeng District of Buri Ram Province. It is named Prasat Nong Hong and was constructed in the Kleang Style 34 (second half of the

33 During the reign of King Jayavarman V [968 - 1001].
34 During the reign of King Uthayatidavaram I [1001-1002].
The sanctuary was dedicated to Indra, as evident from the very detailed designs and exquisitely sculptured sandstone images in the form and shape of lintels and pediments. Depicted are three sculpted images, one of Indra riding the elephant named Erawan, one of Krishna killing a serpent, and another one of Krishna lifting a bull by its horns. Decorative features on lintels and pediments include images of animals such as elephants, squirrels, pigs, monkeys and cattle, as well as floral patterns. The upper part of the tower is missing, including the reduced storeys, cornice and crowning top. Two causes are pondered. While some scholars assumed that construction of the edifice had never been completed, others assumed that by far most structures had either been destroyed.

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Prasat Ban Phluang, Surin

10th century. Images of Indra riding the elephant named Erawan and of Shiva or Phra Isuan were found in this sanctuary. Its central and flanking towers as well as one library building, called bannalai, constructed of laterite, are surrounded by a wall built of laterite and a moat shaped like a horse-shoe.

What has remained of structures erected on a large, square-shaped platform built of laterite, sandstone and brick is the single and small, square-shaped sandstone structure named Prasat Ban Phluang, located in Prasat District of Surin Province. The beginning of construction of originally four towers dates from the Kleang Period (early 11th century). The sanctuary was dedicated to Indra, as evident from the very detailed designs and exquisitely sculptured sandstone images in the form and shape of lintels and pediments. Depicted are three sculpted images, one of Indra riding the elephant named Erawan, one of Krishna killing a serpent, and another one of Krishna lifting a bull by its horns. Decorative features on lintels and pediments include images of animals such as elephants, squirrels, pigs, monkeys and cattle, as well as floral patterns. The upper part of the tower is missing, including the reduced storeys, cornice and crowning top. Two causes are pondered. While some scholars assumed that construction of the edifice had never been completed, others assumed that by far most structures had either been destroyed.

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During the reign of King Jayaviravarman (1002 - 1011).
or dismantled, to use the material for construction elsewhere. The restored half-tower in place is the result of meticulous restoration using artefacts and fragments discovered in the process of excavating, since 1972. The ancient platform or terrace is surrounded by ponds which are the remnants of old moats. In the main axis of the central tower, prasat prathan, is a large pond, called barai in ancient Khmer, which is still used as an irrigation reservoir. The overall layout of the sanctuary reflects the transition from the Kleang to the Baphuon style (first half of the 11th century).

Like the monument named Prasat Sa Kamphaeng Yai in Uthumphon Phisai District of Si Sa Ket Province, the monument known as Tat Ban Prasat or Prasat Ban Prasat in the province’s Huai Thap Than District underwent transformations. First founded as a Hindu sanctuary and laid out in the period of transition from the Kleang to the Baphuon style (early 11th to early 12th centuries), construction was carried through and completed in the Baphuon style (early 11th to early 12th centuries). The sanctuary is situated on a high hill. Its tall central tower and two smaller flanking towers, prang, were built of brick on a single terrace. The portals were constructed of sandstone. Their sculpted lintels depict floral decorations and what appear to be human-like figures. Obviously the sculpting was left unfinished. Such was a common occurrence as evident at several sanctuaries, owing to the fact that sculpting would have to be continued long after completion of construction work. The chiselled lintel engravings visibly outline Shiva with Uma on his lap, riding the ox named Usuparaj or Nanthi. Moreover, sandstone statues of other Hindu deities were found. The terrace is surrounded by a low wall built of laterite. Of its original four gates, only the southern gate remains. After several hundred years of dereliction, this complex was refurbished and consecrated as a Buddhist monastery, by the turn of the 18th century.

The unique attraction of Prasat Don Tuan, situated near the access

36 During the reign of King Suryavarman I [1001-1050].
37 During the reigns of the kings Jayaviravarman [1002 - 1011] and Suryavarman I [1001-1050].
38 During the reign of King Jayavarman VI [1080 - 1107].
route to Khao Phra Vihan, and hence located in Kantharalak District of Si Sa Ket Province, are two rows of three elegant columns which match the jambs of the portal of the tower. It is assumed that these columns are the remains of the gateway, whose roof they once supported. The small Hindu sanctuary was built in the transition period\(^\text{39}\) from the Kleang to the Baphuon styles (early 11\(^{th}\) to early 12\(^{th}\) centuries).

**Monuments and Artefacts Traced to the 11\(^{th}\) Century Onward:**

**Baphuon * Bapuan Style**

Stylistic elements of the Baphuon Period (early 11\(^{th}\) to early 12\(^{th}\) centuries) are found at numerous sites with ancient Khmer monuments. In likely as many cases they are additional features added to existing, older monuments, as there are edifices built during that period. The earliest of the examples of such Hindu sanctuaries presented hereunder is Prasat Ta Leng\(^\text{40}\) in Khukhan District of Si Sa Ket Province. The remains of its original structure (third quarter of the 11\(^{th}\) century) include one tower, *prang*, and both walls of one gateway leading to the portal of the inner sanctum in the tower, all built on a raised terrace. Special attractions are the reliefs carved onto the walls of the gateway and sculpted sandstone lintels, two of them depicting Indra riding his elephant named Erawan enveloped in garlands, and another one showing a hermit in meditation.

Although in ruins, Prasat Prang Ku in Prang Ku District of Si Sa Ket Province is an impressive Hindu sanctuary, built in the Baphuon Period\(^\text{41}\) (early 11\(^{th}\) to early 12\(^{th}\) centuries). Its three towers were built of brick, of a grand design, and erected on a single, high platform. In front of the central tower, though at some distance, is a large pond.

Similar in appearance is Prang Ku Sombun, also known as Ku Ban Nong Ku, in Bueng Bun District of Si Sa Ket Province. It was built in the Baphuon Period\(^\text{42}\) (early 11\(^{th}\) to

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39 During the reign of King Suryavarman I [1001-1050].
40 During the reign of King Udayadityavarman II [1050 - 1066].
41 During the reign of King Harshavarman III [1066 - 1089].
42 During the reign of King Harshavarman III [1066 - 1089].
early 12th centuries), near a historical site with an earthen dyke dotted alongside by pools which seem to be remnants of a moat, all of which is indicative of an ancient town. The prasat has three large towers, prang, set in a row on one and the same laterite base. While the central tower was repeatedly restored, the flanking towers are in ruins. Inside the central tower is a square-shaped stone base of the kind that was supposedly used as base of a stylized phallus known as Shiva Lingam, or of a pedestal supporting the statue of a Hindu deity, or else of a lantern pillar. Artefacts include sandstone lintels and lotus-shaped decorations carved on sandstone. Facing the central tower across some distance is a large pond, a characteristic component of any Hindu sanctuary.

Of the Prasat Yai Ngao, originally comprising of three brick towers on a base built of laterite, only two edifices remain. While the southern tower is preserved almost complete, only half remains of the other. The architectural and art styles suggest that construction was carried out late in the Baphuon Period43 (11th into 12th centuries). The decoration of pediments above false and real doorways shows naga, mythical serpents, with their five heads. Of particular attraction is a sculpture of the makara, a beast in the Hindu cosmology, variously depicted such as with the body of a reptile or dolphin, the head of a lion, the jaws of a crocodile, the claws of an avian raptor, and an elephant trunk. At the inception of restoration work, the surroundings were strewn with fragments of the characteristic decorative feature, sculpted of sandstone. They include pieces likened to the cloves of jackfruit, known in Thai as klip khanun, which are placed at the corners above the fronton of the tower, yot prang, and at each of its reduced storeys rising toward the cornice, and fragments of door decorations as well as colonettes. Prasat Yai Ngao is located in Sangkha District of Surin Province.

Prasat Sikhoraphum is the sole embodiment of the essence of the Baphuon style (early 11th to early 12th centuries), among all monuments erected in this period44, which has remained intact to a degree that

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43 During the reign of King Dharanindravarman I [1107 - 1113].
44 During the reign of King Jayavarman VI [1080 – 1107].
projects a wholesome impression of topos, layout and design. It is situated in a plain known for its heritage of various historical sites, now located in Sikhoraphum District of Surin Province. Laid out in a quincunx and rising above the surrounding terrain, the ancient Hindu sanctuary still is a magnificent sight. Its high platform or terrace was built of laterite and sandstone, almost of square shape with a side length of some 25 metres. The main edifice, prang, in the centre and one such edifice in each corner, were built of laterite, sandstone and brick, in identical style and shape. The five towers were erected to an equal height of 30 metres. Two very large ponds, barai, were constructed with earthen embankment and laterite enclosure. They flank the quincunx toward the north and south. The sanctuary was dedicated to Shiva. It is rich in artefacts sculpted on as well as from sandstone. The five towers are embellished with sculpted lintels and portal colonettes as well as decorative features, known in Thai as klip khanun, at the corners of the reduced storeys of the pyramidal upper part of each edifice. Lintels and sculpted sandstone slates flanked by carved colonettes feature details of the Hindu pantheon, its cosmology and mythology. The lintel of the central tower shows Shiva dancing. Other sculpted images show Ganesha, Brahma, Vishnu, and Paraphati or Uma. Also depicted are apsara, celestial maidens, yaksha, male deities serving as guardians, and floral patterns enhancing door and window frames. Several artefacts are preserved at the Phimai National Museum, among them a lintel from one of the surrounding towers depicting Krishna killing an elephant and a khochasi, a mythical lion an elephant’s trunk.

The Hindu sanctuary of Ku Suan Taeng in Ban Mai Chaiyaphot District of Buri Ram Province is the site where delicately sculpted sandstone fragments were discovered. Designed and constructed in the Baphuon style (early 11th to early 12th centuries), the sanctuary consists of one tall central tower, flanked by two smaller towers. The three towers, erected on a single terrace built of laterite, were constructed of brick. They are the only remaining structures. On the ground of the sanctuary,

\[45\] During the reign of King Dharanindravarman I [1107 – 1113].
Various sandstone fragments were found such as the lotus-shaped crown of one of the towers, the sculpture of a six-headed mythical serpent, naga, intricately shaped like cloves or segments of the jackfruit, known as klip khanun in Thai, various other artefacts, and among some lintels the famous Narai Banthomsin Lintel, an image of Phra Narai Tri Vikrom showing Narai as the triple deity of the underworld, human world and heaven. This lintel was sculpted in the style characteristic of the Angkor Period\(^46\) (12\(^{th}\) century). Together with some other most precious artefacts, it is preserved at the National Museum in Bangkok, while all other artefacts were transferred to the Phimai National Museum.

Similar artefacts preserved by the Phimai National Museum come from the Hindu sanctuary named Prasat Phakho, which is located in Chok Chai District of Nakhon Ratchasima Province. Of its three towers built of white sandstone in the Baphuon Period\(^47\) (early 11\(^{th}\) to early 12\(^{th}\) centuries), two remain surrounded by a moat shaped like a horse-shoe.

The Ta Muean Cluster of Ancient Monuments, as its Thai name of Boran Sathan Klum Prasat Ta Muean translates, is located in Phanom Dong Rak District of Surin Province. It consists of three sites with ruins of ancient Khmer monuments, situated in close vicinity of Thailand’s border with Cambodia. The oldest and largest of the three sanctuaries, Prasat Ta Muean Thom, was constructed on a mountain ridge. In the Baphuon\(^48\) style (early 11\(^{th}\) to early 12\(^{th}\) centuries) a platform or terrace was constructed from sandstone on which all structures were erected. They include one large

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\(^{46}\) During the reign of King Suryavarman II [1113-1150].

\(^{47}\) During the reign of King Dharanindravarman I [1107 – 1113].

\(^{48}\) During the reign of King Dharanindravarman I [1107 - 1113].
central tower, prang, flanked by two small towers. The square-shaped central tower has four gateways, gopura, with inscriptions. All these edifices were built of sandstone. Nearby lies the pond, a characteristic feature of any Hindu sanctuary.

MONUMENTS AND ARTEFACTS TRACED TO THE 12TH CENTURY ONWARD: BAPHUON * BA PUAN, ANGKOR WAT * NAKHON WAT, AND BAYON STYLES

The transition from the Baphuon to the Angkor Wat and, further on, to the Bayon style is evident in the structures of Prasat Kamphaeng Noi in Mueang District of Si Sa Ket Province. The dominant architectural features, however, are those of the Angkor Wat style, known in Thai as the Nakhon Wat style (12th century). The entire complex was built exclusively from laterite. The remains include one tower, prang, which is likely the only one erected, its gateways called gopura, a library building, known as bannalai, and buildings which most likely were added after completion of the edifices characteristic of a Hindu sanctuary. All this is surrounded by a wall that was also built of laterite. Outside, a large pond was constructed, with masonry enclosure and steps leading downward, which has remained in use, to this day. Some sculpted lintels depicting episodes of Hindu mythology are still in place. The two most wonderful lintels went missing. One sculpted lintel shows Shiva and Uma, and the other depicts Waruna, the deity of rain, seated on a palanquin shouldered by three swans. This Shiva sanctuary was transformed into a Mahayana Buddhist sanctuary. In the process it was restored and expanded, as evident from the edifices built in the Bayon style (late 12th to end of 13th century). The additional structures formed the hospital and infirmary, called arokhayasala in Sanskrit and known as arokhayasan in Thai. This ancient sanctuary, hence, housed one of the altogether 104 such hospitals and infirmaries, first built on the

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49 During the reign of King Dharanindravarman II [1150 - 1160].
50 During the reigns of the kings Jayavarman VII [1181-1220], Indravarman II [1220 - 1243], Jayavarman VIII [1243 - 1295], Indravarman III [1295 - 1308], and Indrajayavarman [1308 - 1327].
order of King Jayavarman VII and, thereafter, by his direct successors.

**MONUMENTS AND ARTIFACTS TRACED TO THE 12TH CENTURY ONWARD: ANGKOR WAT * NAKHON WAT, AND BAYON STYLES**

Construction of the Prasat Chom Phra in Chom Phra District of Surin Province was started in the late phase of the Angkor Wat style, known in Thai as the Nakhon Wat style (12th century). Its completion was delayed by the escalating conflict between the Khmer and the Cham in present-day Vietnam, which culminated in the conquest and pillage of Angkor by the Cham. Once construction had been resumed, it was explicitly built as a Mahayana Buddhist sanctuary complete with hospital and infirmary, called *arokhayasala* in Sanskrit and known as *arokhayasan* in Thai. The square-shaped tower, *prang*, the library building, *bannalai*, other edifices, and the surrounding wall were constructed of laterite in the Bayon style. Their sandstone components were sculpted with decorative features. The sanctuary was dedicated to the Bodhisatva *Avalokiteshvara* of the Mahayana Buddhism.

The second structure, in chronological order, of the Ta Muean Cluster of Ancient Monuments had been started very late in the period marked by the Angkor Wat style, known in Thai as the Nakhon Wat style (12th century). Its completion was delayed by the war between the Khmer and the Cham. Once construction had been resumed of the complex named Prasat Ta Muean, it was explicitly built as a Mahayana Buddhist shelter, called *dharma sala* in Sanskrit. The single tower was built of laterite and its portal decorated with a sculpted sandstone lintel. King Jayavarman VII had a total of 18 such stage posts built along the route to Phimai and one such near the Prasat Phimai, providing shelter and serving as rest houses.

51 During the reign of King Yasovarman II [1160 - 1165].
52 During the reign of King Jayavarman VII [1181 - 1220].
53 During the reign of King Tribhuvanadityavarman [1165 - 1177].
54 During the reign of King Jayavarman VII [1181 - 1220].
The third structure of the Ta Muean Cluster of Ancient Monuments is named Prasat Ta Muean Tot. It was designed and built in the Bayon style (late 12th to end of 13th century) as a hospital and infirmary, arokhayasala, by royal command, as known through an inscription in situ which was written in Sanskrit using ancient Khmer letters. The original is preserved in the Tha Wasukri Library, Bangkok. The Mahayana Buddhist sanctuary comprises of a tower, prang, a gateway known as gopura in which the said inscription was installed, and a library known as bannalai, all built of laterite as well as sandstone and surrounded by a wall constructed of laterite. Situated outside are a pond and a second hospital / infirmary building. The sanctuary was dedicated to the Buddha Bhaisajyaguru Waithuraya.

Prasat Khok Ngiu in Pakham District of Buri Ram Province is another such Mahayana Buddhist sanctuary built in the Bayon style (late 12th to end of 13th centuries), with an ancient Khmer hospital and infirmary. It was situated along the Royal Road connecting Phimai with Angkor.

Several ancient sites, first built in earlier centuries of Khmer rule over the area, are known for their transformation into an arokhayasala or arokhayan, a hospital and infirmary. Their origin as Hindu sanctuaries was obscured. There is evidence in architecture and artefacts as well as original dedication reflected in the naming of Hindu sanctuaries pointing to preceding stylistic periods. They include virtually all stylistic periods prior to the last period of magnificent ancient Khmer culture, named after one of the most famous monuments, the Bayon of Angkor. Afar from the ancient city of Angkor, this period marks the conversion to Mahayana Buddhism much more than any major stylistic changes of architecture and artefacts. The placing of Buddha images and of statues of the rulers in sanctuaries as well as the creation of lintels sculpted with Buddhist motifs were, indeed, entirely new.

55 During the reign of King Jayavarman VII [1181 - 1220].
56 During the reign of King Jayavarman VII [1181 - 1220].
The ancient Hindu sanctuary of Prasat Nang Ram in Prathai District of Nakhon Ratchasima Province was purportedly famous for the image of a deity sculpted from green stone. The site has remains of two sanctuaries situated close to each other. Only at one site are there remains still standing. They include one tower, prang, a gateway or gopura connecting it to the surrounding wall constructed of laterite. Inside, there also are buildings of a library, called bannalai, and of a hospital / infirmary called arokhayasala or arokhayasan, which were built of laterite. Outside is a pond whose enclosure was constructed of laterite. Owing to the addition of the hospital, arokhayasala, Prasat Nang Ram was categorized as of the Bayon style (late 12th to end of 13th centuries). The ancient site nearby has remnants of a Hindu sanctuary with three towers surrounded by a wall constructed from laterite and a moat shaped like a horse-shoe.

The distinctive edifice situated near the famous Prasat Mueang Tam named Prasat Kudi Ruesi and located in Prakhon Chai District of Buri Ram Province was designed as a hospital, arokhayasan. As evident from its ruins, it was built of laterite in the Bayon style (late 12th to end of 13th centuries). Another such example is the Prasat Ban Bu located in the same province.

At the site of Ancient Khorat City, named Mueang Khorat Kao in Thai, which is also known as the ancient town called Khorakhapura, Mueang Khorakhapura, located in present Sung Noen District of Nakhon Ratchasima Province, three ancient Khmer sanctuaries are situated. They are known as Prasat Hin Noen Ku, Prasat Mueang Khaek, and Prasat Mueang Kao, in chronological order. The first and second named sanctuaries were built in the Preah Rup style (third quarter of the 10th century); they are introduced above. The third sanctuary, Prasat Mueang Kao, is also known by the name of Prang Khoraburi. It is situated in the compound of the monastery named Wat Prang Mueang Kao, which also encompasses the ancient city gate of the historical town of Khorat. The small sanctuary rests

57 During the reign of King Jayavarman VII [1181 - 1220].
58 During the reign of King Jayavarman VII [1181 - 1220].
on a platform or terrace constructed of laterite. Its single tower, prang, with sandstone jambs on all sides, its partially ruined gateway or gopura, and the library building or bannalai were built of laterite and sandstone. This complex was surrounded by a wall of which the laterite foundation remains. Outside the wall is a square-shaped pond constructed with laterite enclosure. Artefacts such as sculpted sandstone lintels are preserved at the Phimai National Museum. Given the facts that the complex was consecrated as a Mahayana Buddhist sanctuary, a Buddha Footprint was enshrined inside the tower, and it was transformed into a hospital and infirmary, arokhayasala, Prasat Mueang Kao has been categorized as of the Bayon59 style (late 12th to end of 13th centuries).

Upon transformation of the Brahman sanctuary known as Prang Sida, located in Sida District of Nakhon Ratchasima Province, into a Mahayana Buddhist sanctuary, some restoration work was done, likely including the surrounding low wall. All structures were built of laterite. In the same vein, the Hindu sanctuary named Prang Ku, a small, square-shaped tower built of laterite and located in the neighbouring District of Bua Yai, became a Mahayana Buddhist sanctuary. Its tower, prang, houses several Buddha images. The restoration of the two sanctuaries in the Bayon60 style (late 12th to end of 13th centuries) led to their identification as monuments built in the corresponding period.

The two Mahayana Buddhist sanctuaries known as Kudi Ruesi Phimai, an additional structure adjacent to the famous Prasat Phimai in the district of the same name, Nakhon Ratchasima Province, and Prasat Ban Samo, in Prang Ku District of Si Sa Ket Province, are small edifices built in the Bayon61 style (late 12th to end of 13th centuries). This is attested through inscriptions such as the sandstone slate inside the single tower, prang, of Prasat Ban Samo.

The site of Ban Prasat Sanctuary in Prasat District of Surin Province, with remains of its wall constructed of laterite and its ancient pond as the

59 During the reign of King Indravarman II [1220 - 1243].
60 During the reign of King Indravarman II [1220 - 1243].
61 During the reign of King Indravarman II [1220 - 1243].
only structures left, is exemplary of many more ancient sanctuaries which fell into disrepair, were left to dilapidate, served as sources of construction material, or disintegrated to the effect of merely faint traces. Such sites are, therefore, not covered in this overview.

The empire of the ancient Khmer faded away, save some sites with tangible remains. Of these, a steadily increasing number in Isan is being meticulously restored so as to preserve monuments of the cultural heritage of Isan as the centre of Mainland Southeast Asia.

Among the various historical causes of the collapse of the Khmer Empire, the following appear of particular significance in the context of the southern plateau in Isan. The expansion of power had become grossly overextended, given the fact that the local population was a composite of different ethnic groups. Holding sway over more and more people had been a necessity, for the simple reason that people were the single most important resource. In competing for the control over people, the Khmer rulers lost out. Local people themselves were burdened with harsh demands for corvée, labour input without remuneration and sustenance, enforced for the construction of monuments and infrastructure; conscription into the military forces; obligatory services of various other kinds such as maintaining and subsidizing assigned sanctuaries; and excessive tributes in kind to stock the rulers’ warehouses with victuals. The living conditions of the population-at-large were aggravated by the degradation of the physical environment, which was caused by the large-scale exploitation of natural resources. Infant mortality and morbidity rates were high, limiting the overall, average life expectancy to 25 years. Among the gravest endemic diseases were leprosy, dysentery, and a lethal fever that was diagnosed only several centuries later, and has become known as malaria. Under these circumstances, the ruler’s conversion to Mahayana Buddhism with the entailing establishment of hospitals and infirmaries, arokhayasala, in the compound of 104 Buddhist sanctuaries⁶², signals great concern about people’s welfare.

⁶² During the reigns of the kings Jayavarman VII [1181 - 1220], Indravarman II [1220 - 1243], Jayavarman VIII [1243 - 1295] and Indravarman III [1295 - 1308].
Following the demise of Khmer supremacy, the local population in the southern plateau of Isan was a mix of native and displaced ethnic groups. In present Si Sa Ket Province, for example, ethnic Khmer, Kui, Nyer, also called Yo, Yer or Yoi, and Lao, the latter a subgroup of the larger Thai ethnic group, gathered around the emerging town named Mueang Khukhan, at the site of the ancient Prasat Si Liam Dong Lamduan, which evolved into a center of Lan Chang culture. Then and there, the traditional Buddhist faith during the earlier Dvaravati Period converged with the dedication of sanctuaries to Mahayana Buddhism. This convergence became evident in the upkeeping of such sanctuaries as those called up hereunder as examples.

Preserving its ancient structure, the Buddhist monastery named Tat Ban Prasat, located in Huai Thap Than District of Si Sa Ket Province, was modified by adding some structures in the Lan Chang style known as Tat. Thereupon, it was repeatedly renovated, as evident from stylistic features characteristic of the late 18th century.

Wat Maha Phuttharam, a monastery located in Mueang District of Si Sa Ket Province, houses an ancient Khmer statue of the Buddha in the posture of subduing Mara. The core of the 6.85 metre tall image was made of laterite whose surface corroded and gave it a black appearance.

The ancient Prasat Sikhoraphum, located in Sikhoraphum District of Surin Province, was maintained as a Buddhist monastery in the Lan Chang style. Its stucco decorations date from restoration in the 16th century.

Like at numerous other sites with ancient sanctuaries, old and new structures stand side by side, as of now. Examples include Prasat Sa Kamphaeng Yai in Uthumphon Phisai District, Si Sa Ket Province; Prasat Chom Phra in Chom Phra District and Prasat Mueang Thi, where stucco restoration in the cella of the main prang, hence called ruean that, suggests that a Buddha relic was enshrined, in Mueang District, both of Surin Province; Prasat Khok Ngiu in Pakham District, Buri Ram Province; as well as Prasat Mueang Kao in Sung Noen,
Prasat Phanomwan in Mueang, and Prang Ku in Bua Yai districts of Nakhon Ratchasima Province. Rather unique is the historical perspective in Lamduan District of Surin Province, where the compound of the monastery named Wat Prasat Thep Nimit encompasses an erstwhile sanctuary now known as Prasat Tapiang Tia. Owing to its original design of a quincunx, it has five towers, called prang in Thai. Probably in the 16th century, local ingenious craftsmen maintained the square-shaped lower structures and capped the short (tia in Thai) lower sections of the towers with dome-shaped roofs. The result has been called, to this day, bua tum owing to the semblance of budding lotus. To top this metamorphosis, this old Buddhist sanctuary is erroneously categorized as built in the “Lao Style”.

An ancient Buddha image known as “Phra Chao Yai” is housed in the monastery named Wat Sisa Raet, also called Wat Hong, in Phutthaisong District of Buri Ram Province. The two-metre high statue in the meditation posture, sculpted of laterite, was found at a deserted, ancient site in the 15th century.

First established among the regional centres of Isan, as they exist at present, was the town of Nakhon Ratchasima, founded farther downstream on the Takhong River and east of the ancient towns of Sema and Khorakhapura. During the reign of King Narai, the city wall measuring 1,700 by 1,000 metres was built of laterite and bricks, with four gates and surrounded by a moat. French engineers at King Narai’s courts of Lop Buri and Ayutthaya were dispatched to build the city wall complete with fortification. Of the four original gates, remains of the western Chumphon Gate were preserved and restored. From this regional seat of power, Isan was governed. The monastery named Wat Phra Narai Maharat, locally known as Wat Klang, was built during the reign of King Narai. Its vihara, preaching and prayer hall, houses a statue of Vishnu sculpted of sandstone which is revered, to this day. It is one of numerous pieces of carved sandstone collected from nearby ruins of ancient Khmer monuments.

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63 King Narai the Great [1656 - 1688].
The monastery named Wat Bura-pharam, located in Mueang District of Surin Province, houses the old, revered Buddha image named Luang Pho Phra Chi, also known as Luang Pho Prachi, in the subduing Mara posture. The monastery was built by the turn of the 19th century.

A local heroine, Khunying Mo, affectionately called Ya Mo by the people of Nakhon Ratchasima Town, thwarted the advance of the Lao invader Chao Anuwong of Wiang Chan onto Bangkok by a ruse, in 1826. It triggered the invader’s decision to beat his retreat, whereupon he was defeated by the armed forces of King Rama III [1824-1851]. The King knighted the courageous lady and elevated her to the rank and title of Thao Suranari. She expressed her gratitude through founding the monastery named Wat Sala Loi, in 1837. It is situated at the confluence of the Takhong and Mun Rivers in Mueang District of Nakhon Ratchasima Province. Its ubosot, the monks’ assembly and ordination hall, was recognized by the Association of Siamese Architects as an outstanding Thai-style edifice.

Murals on the inside and outside walls of the ubosot, the monks’ assembly and ordination hall, of Wat Na Phra That, also known as Wat Takhu, feature Buddhist episodes as well as scenes of people’s way of life in the first half of the 19th century such as paddy cultivation and fishing. The ubosot, one chedi and the library, ho trai, in the middle of a pond, were built by immigrants from Wiang Chan, present Vientiane, in the Lan Chang Style. They were settled in Pak Thong Chai District of Nakhon Ratchasima Province during the Third Reign [1824-1851].

To commemorate the heroic actions that were conducive to repelling and crushing the invasion of Isan led by Chao Anuwong in 1826, the Thao Suranari Memorial Monument was built in the town of Nakhon Ratchasima, in 1943, and the Wirakam Thung Samrit Memorial Monument erected in honour of another courageous woman by the name of Bunluea and her heroic companions, on the historical battleground in Phimai District of Nakhon Ratchasima Province.
ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Like in other parts of Isan, the vast stock of rock salt, presumably the largest geological formation of its kind world-wide, extends below the southern plateau. In the underground, it expands farther than indicated by the places in which salt farming is still practiced. Salt is being produced by flooding saline water up to the surface. In about half the area of Nakhon Ratchasima Province salt is found dissolved in either the soil or in groundwater.

Saline groundwater, once a natural resource that was put to productive use, has become a severe problem, in the course of environmental degradation. Given the geophysical conditions of the southern plateau of Isan, surface water has been the vital source. Many centuries ago, the natural setting of the Mun River Basin was a reliable source of surface water. As long as the mountains and hills had dense forest cover, rainfall was absorbed, largely retained and steadily released into the many tributaries of the Mun River. In the course of constructing ever more and ever larger strategic outposts throughout the expanding empire of Khmer rulers, in particular, the increasing demand for wood caused deforestation.

The requirement of timber was immense. It was needed for scaffolding of huge dimensions, given the sheer size of the completed monuments. Hardwood was used as a structural component, as inferred by archaeologists in explaining the “missing links” in monuments built of sandstone, laterite and bricks. Timber was the raw material for the interior finishing such as ceiling and wall panels, and for doors as well as shutters. As scholars pointed out, based on inscriptions and the detailed account by Chou Ta-kuan, alternatively transliterated as Zhou Daguan, a Chinese visitor to Angkor for almost a whole year, in 1296-1297, palatial residences and compounds of members of the feudal hierarchy were built of wood. Lumber was needed to erect worksheds, labour-lines, and huts for the common people. Moreover, wood was the virtually sole source of energy. Fuel-wood was continuously in high demand for all sorts of processing that require heating.
such as boiling and cooking, lighting with torches, and firing kilns. Hence, lumber and crooked wood, or knee-wood, were consumed in even larger quantities than timber.

The magnitude of fuel-wood consumption is evident from the use of bricks for construction, the fired-clay decorations of buildings, the wide range of pottery, and the many kilns, known in Thai as *tao boran*, operated throughout the southern plateau of Isan. In present Ban Kruat District of Buri Ram Province alone, archaeological surveys led to the discovery of more than 100 ancient Khmer kilns of the type with roofs shaped like a turtle-shell. These kilns are up to twelve metres long and three metres wide. Since 1957, thorough research has been focused on selected kilns in the districts of Ban Kruat and Lahan Sai, including the ones named Tao Barani, Tao Sawai and Tao Nai Chian. Excavations yielded jars, elongated water vessels, bowls, ornamental pieces for buildings, construction materials, glazed pottery, tools for pottery production, and materials for glazing. Ban Kruat Pottery pieces are characteristically glazed in brown, green and white.

The Fine Arts Department restored the ancient kilns of Tao Sawai and Tao Nai Chian. Artefacts are preserved and displayed at the Southern Isan Cultural Centre, *Sun Watthanatham Isan Tai*, in Buri Ram Town and at the Phimai National Museum in Nakhon Ratchasima Province.

Deforestation in the plains became permanent in that land was cleared for field cropping. Food security was a necessity of high priority which by far exceeded the peasants’ subsistence requirements. Supplies had to be produced for delivery to the feudal hierarchy and for the high proportion of the population absorbed in construction works and the armed forces.

Another cause of deforestation was quarrying. Mountains formed of sandstone massifs were denuded of their vegetation and soil cover so as to access the solid rock and operate quarries. Three ancient quarries, known as *laeng tat hin* in Thai, illustrate the preference and demand for sandstone. In Ban Kruat District of Buri Ram Province, the sandstone quarries of the Khmer Period in the mountain area of the Khao Kloi and Khao Krachiao, covering an area of...
480 hectares, were the source of construction material for several prasat, Hindu sanctuaries. Traces of the sheer size of blocks once cut are still visible as well as some already cut yet not used blocks. Another example is the ancient quarry called Phap Salak Nun Tam where blocks were cut for the construction of the Prasat Khao Phra Vihan. This quarry is located in Kantharalak District of Si Sa Ket Province. White sandstone blocks used to build, for example, Prasat Mueang Khaek, Prasat Non Ku and Prasat Mueang Kao, situated in the ancient city named Mueang Khorat or Khorakhapura, were cut in the quarry known as Laeng Hin Tat Sikhio, as obvious from the traces in the rock from which square-shaped blocks had been cut. It is situated in Sikhio District of Nakhon Ratchasima Province.

Deforestation in the mountains and hills triggered soil erosion caused by the run-off of rain-water and wind which, in turn, led to flash floods, thus wasting water resources. In the plains, the removal of top soil to gain access to the layer of laterite caused the loss of soil fertility and accelerated erosion. By nature, laterite is a widespread layer of soft mudstone beneath the top soil. Immediately upon removal of the top soil, laterite is still soft and can easily be quarried and cut into the required shape and size. Once exposed to air and sunshine, the water in this spongy mudstone evaporates. Any such block hardens and becomes a porous rock, red in colour and with a rough surface. It was widely used in building the shells of large structures, with sandstone and bricks added to create sculpted facades. As visible, many walls surrounding ancient sanctuaries were constructed of laterite. Laterite has been used for wall construction, to this day.

Over time, environmental degradation worsened to the effect that flash floods and droughts not only wrought havoc, time and again, but also were erroneously perceived as “natural” phenomena. The tracing of the historical root causes has facilitated the conceptualization and implementation of rehabilitation strategies, envisioned by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej. Upon the King’s advice, a pilot project was launched, in 1986, to rehabilitate the Phang Chu River Basin which straddles parts of Na Chueak District.
in Maha Sarakham Province, Nong Song Hong District in Khon Kaen Province, and Na Pho District in Buri Ram Province. It is known as the Nong Song Hong Project, for short.

**REHABILITATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES**

Nature reserves range in size from very large to small, with corresponding varieties of plants and wildlife. By far the largest is the Khao Yai National Park, with an area of 2,168 square kilometres, which almost equals the European country of Luxembourg and is double the size of the whole of Hong Kong. The park straddles parts of Nakhon Ratchasima, Prachin Buri, Nakhon Nayok and Saraburi Provinces. It is recognized as an “ASEAN Heritage Park”. Of medium size, in comparison, is the Khao Phra Vihan National Park in Kantharalak District of Si Sa Ket Province, covering 130 square kilometres in the mountains of the Phanom Dong Rak Range, at the border of Thailand and Cambodia. Examples of nature reserves which cover small areas include the Hat Chom Tawan Section, situated in Soeng Sang District of Nakhon Ratchasima Province, which is one of four sections of the Thap Lan...
National Park, largely located in Prachin Buri Province; the Sakaerat Forest Reserve on 78 square kilometres as well as the Khao Phaeng Ma Forest Reserve, both in Wang Nam Khiao District of Nakhon Ratchasima Province; the Khao Kradong Forest Park as well as the Bird Park, Suan Nok, in Mueang District, and the Sanam Bin Reservoir No-hunting Zone in Prakhon Chai District, all three in Buri Ram Province; and the Phanom Dong Rak Wildlife Reserve in Khukhan District of Si Sa Ket Province.

The spectrum of various types of forests encompasses damp as well as dry primary, mixed mountain forests, including hardwood and deciduous forests. Trees of note include fig \([Ficus]\), pandan \([Pandanus spp.]\), cinnamon tree \([Cinnamomum spp.]\), arboreal basil \([Ocimum basilicum]\), wild rambutan \([Nephelium lappaceum]\), eagle wood \([Aquilaria agallocha]\), and giant ironwood \([Hopea odorata]\).

Given the vegetation cover, especially forests, there is a great diversity of wildlife. Examples of herbivorous mammals are elephants, gibbons, boars, porcupines, giant squirrels, and hares. Among the carnivorous mammals are black bears and dholes, also known as Asiatic wild dogs. Ungulates include the very rare gaur \([Bibos gaurus]\), sambar deer, barking deer and goat-antelopes. Examples of felines are Bengal tigers and Burmese civets as well as palm civets. Among fowl species are jungle fowl and Siamese firebacks. Water fowl include comb ducks, white-winged ducks and cotton pygmy-geese. The bird species are numerous, amounting to more than 300, among them some 200 residents. Examples are hornbills including the brown, wreathed, oriental pied, and great hornbills; hill myna; minivets including the ashy, rosy, small, and scarlet minivets; pittas including the blue-winged, hooded, blue, and eared pittas; barbets including the lineated, green-eared, moustached, blue-eared, and coppersmith barbets; thick-billed pigeons; doves including the barred cuckoo-doves and red turtle-doves, as well as spotted, zebra, and emerald doves; the greater and the lesser coucals; and flycatchers including Hainan blue, blue-throated, hill blue, Tickell’s blue, and Asian paradise flycatchers. The variety of butterflies amounts to about 5,000 species.
ETHNIC DIVERSITY

In presenting briefs on features which are intertwined into the unique cultural fabric of the four provinces on the southern plateau of Isan, namely, Nakhon Ratchasima, Buri Ram, Surin and Si Sa Ket, the various ethnic groups are called up whose traditions are reflected in language, architecture, arts, folklore, crafts, and celebrations. This cultural diversity is highlighted as a major attraction. It is the outcome of assimilation into the mainstream population, however, without acculturation. The result may be likened to a multi-facetted cultural identity.

People of Isan who identify themselves as Thai Korat are at home in the provinces of Nakhon Ratchasima, Buri Ram, and Chaiyaphum. They are also known as Thai Phoeng. Their vernacular is a distinctive variant of the Thai language. Speakers of a different Thai vernacular, concentrated in Wang Hin District of Si Sa Ket Province, consider themselves to be Thai Isan.

Like in many other places, the Lao people resettled in the south of Isan, far away from their homeland around the present Vientiane, built a Buddhist monastery as the focal point of their community. Wat Na Phra That, also known as Wat Takhu, in Pak Thong Chai District of Nakhon Ratchasima Province is a fine example. Including its chedi, ubosot, monk’s assembly and ordination hall, and ho trai, library building, in the middle of a pond, the complex was built in the Third Reign [1824-1851]. Murals on the walls of the ubosot, inside and outside, depict Buddhist episodes as well as scenes of people’s way of life in the Third Reign such as paddy-growing and fishing.

Descendants of immigrants from Champasak in present southern Laos, resettled over several centuries, live in Si Sa Ket Province. The monument to symbolize the synergy of different ethnic groups in progressing coalescence is the edifice named Phra That Rueang Rong. Its architecture blends the styles of four ethnic groups of the area, including the Lao, Kui, Khmer and Nyer, also called Yo, Yer or Yoi. The six storeys of the 48-metre high building, located in Mueang District of Si Sa Ket Province, are dedicated to be used for religious
ceremonies (1st storey), as ethno-
graphic museum representing the
four groups (2nd and 3rd storeys), as
abode of Buddha images (4th storey),
for meditation (5th storey), and as
repository of the Buddha relic (6th
storey).

The Nyer are descendants of
people who migrated from the area
around Attopeu Town, south of the
Boloven Plateau in present southern
Laos. Those migrants were settled in
places that belong to the present
districts of Rasi Salai, Phrai Bueng,
Phayu and Mueang of Si Sa Ket
Province. They have formed big
communities and maintain their own
language, which belongs to the
group of Mon-Khmer languages. As
manifest in the edifice named Phra
That Rueang Rong, the Nyer are part
of the ethnic and cultural fabric.

The living heritage of the rule of
the ancient Khmer empire over the
southern plateau is the population
group of ethnic Khmer. They live
near where the monumental outposts
were built, although at substantial
numbers in the belt along the Dong
Rak Mountain Range. Like in Si Sa
Ket Province, where the edifice
named Phra That Rueang Rong
attests to their assimilation, they
also live in the provinces of Surin
and Buri Ram. Their language
belongs to the group of Mon-Khmer
languages.

At various points in time such as
around 1650 and by the end of the
18th century, several groups of Kui
came from Champasak, in the south
of present Laos, to settle in southern
Isan. They are also referred to as Sui,
a name which they reject as debasing.
Their language belongs to the group
of Mon-Khmer languages. Kui
villages are concentrated in Si Sa Ket
Province, where according to the
official census of 1927 most
inhabitants were ethnic Kui. This is
manifest in the edifice named Phra
That Rueang Rong, with its Kui
component of the local ethnic and
cultural fabric. In neighbouring
Surin Province, Kui villages are
situated in the districts of Samrong
Thap, Sikhoraphum, Tha Tum,
Chumphon Buri, Sanom, Chom Phra
and Mueang. The Kui are recognized
as experts in corralling and taming
wild elephants, since historical time.
Nowadays, they specialize in raising
and rearing elephants. In more than
20 villages, mainly of Tha Tum
District of Surin Province and in
some of Duan Yai Sub-district in
Wang Hin District of Si Sa Ket Province, hundreds of elephants are reared and trained. The famous “elephant village” is Ban Tha Klang, located in Tha Tum District of Surin Province. The Southern Isan Cultural Centre in Buri Ram Town has displays with information about the Kui and their skills in corralling, raising, rearing, taming, and training elephants.

As stated in a document published by Thailand’s Office of the National Culture Commission, “all these ethnic groups are fully assimilated and consider themselves Thais.”

RESTORATION THROUGH ANASTYLOSIS AND PRESERVATION OF ARTEFACTS

The conservation of the built environment is highly visible, and to an almost unparalleled extent and degree, at that. Numerous dilapidated ancient sites were restored by the Fine Arts Department, with Royal Thai Government funding support, to their original magnificence and splendour. Employing the method known as anastylosis and related technology, fragments of a dilapidated structure are inventoried and, likewise, the remaining structure...
components are dismantled. Combining the original materials and techniques with modern technology, especially by constructing a ferro-cement core skeleton, an ancient structure is rebuilt following its original design, to recreate and preserve its authentic appearance.

Adopting a systematic approach, ancient monuments were restored in a wholesome manner. Examples given below stand for a much greater number of such projects. Many were completed, while others have been undergoing restoration, and more are targeted for archaeological surveying.

The majestic, ancient Khmer site of Prasat Phanom Rung was restored during the years 1972 through 1988 and, then, “crowned” with a replica of its famous Narai Banthomsin Lintel, upon the retrieval of the original from a collection abroad and its preservation in Thailand’s National Museum in Bangkok. The setting of the sanctuary was transformed into the Phanom Rung Historical Park, located in Chaloem Phra Kiat District of Buri Ram Province. Nearby, in the neighbouring Prakhon Chai District of the same province, the elegant Prasat Mueang Tam was restored to its serene grandeur.

The singularly outstanding example of a prasat and its ensemble in ancient Khmer architecture outside Cambodia is the authentic setting which was transformed into the cultural heritage site named Phimai Historical Park. The prasat rises above the spacious ground with classical structures, surrounded by a wall. It is located in Phimai Town, in the district of the same name, part
Other examples of completed as well as ongoing restoration are the very old Prasat Phanomwan in Mueang District of Nakhon Ratchasima Province; the Prasat Sa Kamphaeng Yai in Uthumphon Phisai District as well as the Prasat Ban Prasat, also known as Prasat Huai Thap Than, in Huai Thap Than District, both of Si Sa Ket Province; and the Prasat Sikhoraphum in Sikhoraphum District as well as the Prasat Ban Phluang in Prasat District, both of Surin Province.

Some of the most precious items of the Isan heritage are preserved by the National Museum in Bangkok. Examples include carved sandstone lintels from Prasat Phanomwan and Prasat Phanom Rung, as well as sandstone inscriptions from the realm of King Chitrasen of Chenla, found in Buriram, Surin and Si Sa Ket provinces.

At the regional level, the Phimai National Museum has a valuable collection of artefacts from the ancient Lower Isan, as the southern plateau of Isan is also known. The museum has two sections, one that holds prehistoric items such as pottery including precious band-
ceramic ware, skeletons, tools, and stone as well as alloy ornaments, and another one for artefacts from historic periods. The latter collection includes sandstone boundary markers, bai sema, from the Dvaravati Period; images of the Buddha and of Bodhisatvas; fragments of ancient Khmer structures such as sculpted sandstone lintels, colonettes of gateways, gopura, and pediments; Hindu deity images; and a rare image of King Jayavarman VII sculpted of sandstone, which was found in the Prasat Phimai.

Many items of the Isan cultural heritage have been preserved at the local level, mostly by monasteries. Monks as well as members of the lay community saw to it that artefacts are kept safely and remain accessible to be viewed. In some instances, items of local cultural heritage were incorporated into a monastery such as Buddha images housed in ordination halls known as ubosot. In other cases, buildings were constructed in which to display collections.

Wat Thammachak Semaram in Sung Noen District of Nakhon Ratchasima Province, built at an ancient Dvaravati religious site,
houses an ancient reclining Buddha statue and a Dharma Wheel, along with boundary markers, *bai sema*, in the immediate surroundings. Wat Sutthachinda in Mueang District of Nakhon Ratchasima Province maintains, in its compound, the Maha Wirawong National Museum. It preserves a late abbot’s collection of artefacts found or excavated in the province and neighbouring areas. They are mostly Buddha images of the Khmer Period sculpted of laterite. Wat Phra Narai Maharat, also known as Wat Klang, built when King Narai the Great founded the present town of Nakhon Ratchasima, in the 17th century, has preserved many pieces of carved sandstone from ruins of Khmer sanctuaries situated nearby. Wat Pho Yoi, also known as Wat Ban Pakham, located in Pakham District of Buri Ram Province, is known for the preservation of boundary markers, *bai sema*, from the Dvaravati Period, and of colonettes which once embellished the gateways and portals of ancient Khmer sanctuaries.

**BROAD-BASED DEVELOPMENT**

The conservation of the cultural heritage of the southern plateau of Isan, of its historical assets as much as its highly diverse traditional customs, holds strong potential for regional economic development. Attracting visitors motivated by intellectual curiosity and anxious to explore historical sites in exotic places, in other words, people fond of travelling and eager to let themselves be amazed by wonders of the world, has triggered the budding of a hospitality industry in Isan.

In this vein, strategies were conceptualized to halt environmental degradation caused by the extensive and excessive use of natural sources. The challenge being tackled at present is to rehabilitate the physical environment. This is of vital importance given the topographic conditions and climatic characteristics of the area,
which is situated in the rain shadow area of the mountain ranges named San Kamphaeng and Dong Rak. They form a barrier against the south-west monsoon, with the effect of a continental, semi-arid climate. Water resources development is, therefore, a much greater necessity in the southern plateau than in other parts of Isan.

To ease water shortage in the dry season and safeguard against flash floods in the rainy season, dams were built across numerous small rivers. By the sheer volume of water retention, a distinction is made between lakes and reservoirs. Such lakes are known by the name of the dam, called khuean in Thai, constructed to store water and, in some instances, also to generate electricity. Examples are Lam Takhong, Lam Phra Phloeng, Lam Chae, Lam Plai Mat, and Mun Bon in Nakhon Ratchasima Province; Lam Nong Rung in Buri Ram Province; Huai Saneng in Surin Province; and Huai Khanun in Si Sa Ket Province. Reservoirs of smaller size and volume are called ang kep nam. Examples are Sap Pradu and Lam Chamuak in Nakhon Ratchasima Province; Nong Thalok, Thung Kraten, Sanam Bin, Chorakhe Mak, Huai Talat, Huai Sawai, Huai Yai, Kradong, and Thung Laem in Buri Ram Province; Ta Kao, Huai Khing, Ban Krathiam, Ampuen, Ban Ko Kao, Lam Phok, and Ban Phue in Surin Province; as well as Huai Sala, Ta May, Wang Hin, Huai Rai Ban Bok, Nong Waeng, and Huai Khem in Si Sa Ket Province.

As evident from the creation of protected areas, wild-growing vegetation cover is of vital importance for environmental conservation. It is for this reason that reforestation has been launched. Three projects may serve as examples. The Reforestation Project in commemoration of the King’s Throne Jubilee (Khrongkan Pluak Pa Chaloem Phra Kiat Phrabat Somdej Phra Chao Yu Hua) covers 1,600 hectares around the mountain named Khao Phaeng Ma in Wang Nam Khiao District of Nakhon Ratchasima Province. Also in that district, the Sakaerat Environmental Research Station conducts the rehabilitation of a primary or virgin dry forest with valuable hardwood trees in an area of 7,800 hectares. Through a joint venture of Thailand and Denmark,
experimentation and demonstration of coniferous tree forest growing were launched on a high plateau covering 100 hectares in Lamduan District of Surin Province.

Foci of agricultural development are exemplified by the following ventures. The Agricultural Experimentation Centre in Kham Thale So Sub-district of the District of the same name in Nakhon Ratchasima Province promotes integrated field cropping, poultry rearing and aquaculture. In Pak Chong District of that province lies the National Maize and Millet Research Centre. In the same province, there are two pilot ventures of bio-ecological farming in the mountainous Wang Nam Khiao District. One specializes in the growing of temperate-climate lettuce, and the other in horticulture on 6.4 hectares planted with mangosteen, longkong, longan and lychee trees.

Proof of the feasibility to do agriculture has long been rendered by agribusiness enterprises operating in the area. Examples include the Chok Chai Farm specializing in cattle rearing; five vineyards ranging in size between one and 320 hectares; and a farm growing flowers of some 300 species on eleven hectares. All these commercial enterprises are situated in Pak Chong District of Nakhon Ratchasima Province.

Building productive communities lays the foundation of sustainable development. Skill training is essential for the upgrading of human resources. In this spirit, Her Majesty Queen Sirikit established the Foundation for Supplementary Occupational Research and Training, known as the SUPPORT Foundation, in short. Its outreach activities are geared to preserve traditional crafts and artisanship with the underpinning by state-of-the-art technologies and modern management practices. An example is the self-help organization of Na Pho Silk Fabric Weaving Villages in Na Pho District of Buri Ram Province. This traditional centre of silk fabric weaving has received assistance from the SUPPORT Foundation in the techniques of designing, pattern development, silk yarn dying, and marketing.
In the same vein, the Royal Thai Government launched the strategy of enabling each sub-district (tambon in Thai) to build strength in the manufacturing of one competitive product. Heralded as the One Tambon One Product [OTOP] project, its spectrum of products is wide. Examples from the southern plateau of Isan include silk production and fabric weaving, pottery, and wickerwork as well as basketry. Villagers at Lung Pradu Samakkhi in Huai Thalaeng District of Nakhon Ratchasima Province grow mulberry trees, raise silkworms, spin silk yarn, dye it using natural substances as well as synthetic colours, and weave fabric in traditional as well as modern designs. Their manufacturing is underpinned by a community-based revolving fund system. Similar home industries producing silk are operated by villagers of Chan Rom in Mueang District and of Khwao Sinarin in the District of the same name, both located in Surin Province. They turn out silk fabric of marvellous design and high-quality. In the latter village, a second manufacturing line is specialized in accessories for lady garments.

The century-old tradition of pottery is upheld in many locations. Perhaps the best-known place is the proverbial Dan Kwian Pottery Village in Chok Chai District of Nakhon Ratchasima Province. Artisans use clay from the bed of the Mun River. The name of the community is a reminder of the time in history when it was a check-point [dan in Thai] and stage-post on the trade route, with commodities transported on ox-carts [kwian in Thai], between Isan and the plain around the Thonle Sap in present Cambodia. Another traditional craft is upheld by villagers at Ban Buthom in Mueang District of Surin Province. Wickerwork and basketry using bamboo and rattan, in combination with applying clay and resin, are the skills employed to manufacture various utensils such as containers which are used to lift, carry as well as store water, and to create miniature items figuring local-style homesteads, livestock and vehicles, to meet visitors’ demand for souvenirs.

Dan Kwian Terracotta pottery
Integrity with Diversity

Eastern Mountains, Valleys and Coast

Topographical Orientation

Features of great variety are spatially concentrated in the eastern region. One example is its topography, with cross-sections from some of Thailand’s highest mountains, with hills, river valleys and plains alongside, reaching down to the sea shore. Another example is the melting pot of ethnic groups, including people who are Thai, Chong, Khmer, or descendants of Annamite, Lao, Malay, Chinese and Kula immigrants. The interfacing of cultures has resulted in shaping a distinct eastern population whose members preserve diversity in commonality. Above all, in historical perspective the area was contested between the ancient kingdoms of the Khmer and the Thai. Eventually, the Thai retained control and used it as the base to rally forces, upon the fall of Ayutthaya, for the resurrection of Siam. They ultimately repelled the occupation of the region’s south-eastern part by the French colonial empire. In short, the eastern region has attained symbolic significance for Thailand’s territorial integrity.

Geographically, the coastal area between the mouths of the Chao Phraya River and the South China Sea is a vast plain, interspersed with some mountain ranges and rolling hills. Of considerable height are the mountains of the San Kamphaeng Range, which separates the Khorat Plateau to the north from the Chanuan Thai Plain to the south, and the mountains of the Banthat Range which run in southeastern direction, in parallel to the Cardamom Mountains in Cambodia. The region’s long coastline facilitates contacts across the sea, far beyond the Gulf of Thailand. Its proximity to historic empires in eastern Mainland Southeast Asia explains the traces of those cultures.

The present-day shape of the region, both in regard of Thailand’s boundary with Cambodia and in terms of its subdivision into provinces, largely corresponds to watersheds.
and river basins. Looking at the headwater areas in the north, and proceeding from there toward the southeastern tip, the largest basin is formed by the Prachin Buri River, which itself merges with the Nakhon Nayok River. From their confluence onward, the downstream section is known as Bang Pakong River. The many tributaries, which flow from the eastern central highlands and empty into it, form the Bang Pakong River Basin. The Bang Phai, Yai or Rayong, and Prasae rivers run parallel in north-south direction. The Tanot, Chan-thaburi, Phra Phut, Welu, Khao Saming and Phrom Hot rivers flow from the mountains in southern direction. Some rivers running eastward from the Chanuan Thai Plain, in which parts of Prachin Buri and Sa Keo provinces are located, and from the eastern flank of the Khao Soi Dao Mountain Range form part of the Tonle Sap Basin, which itself is part of the Lower Mekong River Basin. From its northern reach to its southeastern tip, the coastal sea is dotted with islands, large and small.

Owing to the fact that the navigating on rivers, in coastal waters and along sea routes was the major means of communication and transportation, Thailand’s eastern region has become an area where ethnic groups, religions, and cultures met and fuelled a process of remarkably smooth assimilation and acculturation. The result is integration, underpinned by territorial integrity, which is enriched through diversity as much as it is based on commonalities.
PREHISTORY AND EARLY HISTORY

The earliest traces date from the Sosoic Period. They are eleven, differently sized footprints of the dinosaurs named *Carnosaurus*, imprinted on a large sandstone rock, at the edge of the Sai Yai River in Prachin Buri Province. Evidence of prehistoric human habitat was found at two sites. The shell mound named Khok Phanom Di in Chon Buri Province, excavated by archaeologists, is twelve metres high at its top and covers more than four hectares. Findings include human skeletons, polished stone tools, pottery, ornaments made of sea shells and semi-precious stones, all on a layer of sediment consisting of cockle shells. In neighbouring Rayong Province, the laterite hill called Khao Wong has 86 interconnected grottoes, where fragments of earthenware, knife sharpening stones, animal bones and shells were found.

Among the remains of early history, three sites are of outstanding significance. In the region’s northern plain, there in present-day Prachin Buri Province, is the site known as Mueang Si Mahosot. Its ruins of sanctuaries are part of an ancient city of the Suwannaphum Realm, which flourished beginning some 2,300 years ago. Archaeologists consider the site a historical place where architecture, art and lifestyle are marvellously tangible. This ancient city was laid out in rectangular shape, with the sides measuring 700 and 1,550 metres, thus covering an area of more than one square kilometre, and enclosed by walls and moats. Inside are the ruins of a sanctuary dedicated to Indra and a statue of Vishnu as Harihara sculpted from one large block of sandstone. Places of worshipping situated outside the city walls, particularly many Buddha images in different postures made of sandstone or laterite,
are an indication that there existed a large, prosperous community of Buddhists. All evidence points to continuity until into the Dvaravati Period.

The site named Khao To Mo and located in Trat Province is shrouded in mystery. It has the appearance of a gigantic, ancient ruin. A cone-shaped mound with slabs of rock, called Saen Tum, forms an octagon with a diameter of 12.2 kilometres. It seems, indeed, covered by a hundred thousand (saen in Thai), dark brown stone columns (tum in Thai). Their shapes vary between square and nonagon, with their lengths ranging from 30 to 150 centimetres and their weight from 10 to 100 kilograms. When beaten, some resound like a gong. While some geologists argue that these strange-looking basalt rocks result from natural erosion, archaeologists assume that this is a site where stone columns were cut, since very early in history and until the time of Khmer dominance in the area. This assumption is supported by findings in a five-kilometre radius from this spot. They include various prehistoric artefacts, stoneware, earthenware, a mortar, remains of a place of worship and an ancient Buddha image. Such evidence indicates that the area is the site of an ancient settlement. In 1988, it was registered as an ancient monument.

In Chanthaburi Province is the location known as Nang Kawai, named after a legendary queen and the centre of her realm of the same name, which was conquered by a Khom ruler from Nakhon Thom, near Angkor. There, inscriptions in the Khom language were found which are deemed 2,400 years old. The most important finding is a sandstone slab (49 cm wide, 47 cm high, and 16.5 cm thick), inscribed in ancient Khom letters which convey a text in the Sanskrit and Khom
All historical data, i.e. years and centuries, refer to the chronology of the Western Calendar. This stone inscription is now kept at the Vachirayan Library in Bangkok. In the 2nd century the ancient centre was seized by the ruler of Suwannaphum. It remained the seat of local power until 1384, when it was abandoned due to severe flooding.

**MONUMENTS AND ARTEFACTS TRACED TO THE 7TH UNTIL 8TH CENTURIES: EXAMPLES OF THE DVARAVATI CULTURE**

At the ancient site of Mueang Si Mahosot in Prachin Buri Province, originally a centre of the Suwannaphum Kingdom, a large Buddhist community flourished in the Dvaravati Period. Further to earlier known artefacts, especially numerous Buddha statues, the more recent discovery, in February 1986, of the largest and oldest footprints ever found in Thailand strengthens the evidence of a Buddhist community in the Dvaravati Period. The precious relic was discovered near the pond named Sa Morakot. The Pair of Lord Buddha’s Footprints is carved on the natural laterite floor. It is situated near the pond which was built several centuries later. Each foot is 1.3 metre wide and 3.5 metres long, with the Wheel of Dhamma in the middle of each sole. The Pair of Footprints is dated as of the 7th to 8th centuries.

The likely most ancient Buddha statue in the area, an image in the Dvaravati style of exceptional beauty and refinement, said to be 1,200 to 1,300 years old, is housed in the Ho Phra Phanasabodi, the shrine of the “Lord of the Forest”, located in Phanat Nikhom District of Chon Buri Province. Carved out of a finely textured, black rock, it rests on a pedestal which features a composite garuda, cow and swan image.

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1 All historical data, i.e. years and centuries, refer to the chronology of the Western Calendar.
MONUMENTS AND ARTEFACTS TRACED TO THE 7TH UNTIL 13TH CENTURIES: EXAMPLES OF THE KHMER STYLE

Spectacular ruins of sanctuaries built in the ancient Khmer style are concentrated in the northern part of the eastern region. Sa Kaeo Province has two important sites. The one called Prasart Khao Noi, in Aranyaprathet District, comprises of three towers, prang, on a hill, with 254 steps leading up to its top. These towers were built from brick and surrounded by laterite walls. The central structure with a height of 80 metres is in better condition than the two other ruined ones. Inscriptions and objects indicate that the sanctuary was built in the 7th to 8th centuries. Hindu inspired decorative motifs, some lingas, sandstone lintels and statues found at the site are displayed at the Prachin Buri National Museum. Another ancient Khmer-style sanctuary, Prasat Sa Dok Kok Thom, comprises of an ensemble of sandstone towers, prang, surrounded by laterite walls. Important findings at this ancient site are two stone inscriptions, now kept in the National Library in Bangkok.

To the southeast of the ancient city of Mueang Si Mahosot in Prachin Buri Province, at short distance, lies Sa Morakot, a reservoir built in the reign of King Jayavarman VII [1181-1220]. It was constructed
from laterite and decorated with carved ornamentation. At its northwest corner, laterite blocks of sluices are still in place. Pedestals, boundary stones, laterite lions and nagas, all found in the area, were brought together at this point. A sandstone lingam, nearly two metres high and split vertically, is still an object of worship. Nearby, a Pair of Lord Buddha’s Footprints was discovered in February 1986, which is far more ancient than the pond. Presumably, the pond was constructed near the Holy Relic.

At Nang Kawai in Chanthaburi Province, there is the ancient site called Ban Phaniat, also Mueang Phaniat, at the foot of the Sa Bap Mountain. It is 17 metres wide and 57 metres long, with walls built from laterite. While some archaeologists assume this massive structure to be the foundation of a large building, others consider it as a fortified seaport, owing to its site at a silted branch of the Chanthaburi River Estuary. There are ruined parts of an inner laterite wall and remnants of an outer earthen wall, between 1 and 3 metres high. There is consensus that the site was inhabited from the 9th to 11th centuries. It is considered an important centre of civilization of the ancient Khmer Empire.

This is evident from the Khmer-style artefacts which were incorporated into the construction of the monastery named Wat Thong Thua. Some 200 years ago, it was built over the laterite base of a large, ancient Khmer-style sanctuary which existed from the 7th to 11th centuries. The large collection of Khmer-style sculptures such as lintels, sandstone door colonettes carved in various designs and inscription stones gives vivid testimony to this cultural heritage. These ancient artefacts are kept in the old monks’ assembly and ordination hall, the ubosot. Most are of the Thala Boriwat art style. Nearby remnants of moats mark the ancient town limit to the south. It likely is the site of the earliest town of Chanthaburi, established more than 1,000 years ago.
In the compound of the monastery named Wat Ton Pho Si Maha Phot, in Prachin Buri Province, lies rather than stands the largest and oldest Bhodi or banyan tree in the country. The seedling stock was brought over from Bodhgaya in India. This sacred banyan tree is surrounded by two circular terraces and by an octagonal open gallery. Under the canopy is a large seated Buddha statue, and various Buddha images in different postures are placed around the trunk. In the same province lies the monastery known as Wat Kaeo Phichit. With its date of construction unknown, any explanation of the exceptional combination of details in the Greek and Thai styles is still wanting. The mural paintings in its ubosot are marvellous.

Consolidation of the Thai Polity

Given the date of its original construction, the monastery known as Wat Buppharam or Wat Plai Khlong in Trat Province certainly is one of the oldest Thai-style religious edifices. It was built in 1648, during the reign of King Prasat Thong [1629-1656]. In its compound stands Thailand’s oldest vihara with wooden walls, resting on a brick base of gunwale shape, constructed late in the Ayutthaya Period. The unique collection of Chinese porcelain was built from gifts by Chinese traders from the Far East and by Chinese merchants who, having fled from places in Southeast Asia at times of turmoil, war, or surge in piracy, found a safe haven in Trat. Like pieces of European porcelain, those artefacts render evidence of maritime trade relations, in the past. They are displayed in a newly built museum within the monastery.

Built toward the end of the Ayutthaya Period, the monastery named Wat Yai Inthraram, in Chon Buri Province, is an example of exquisite architecture. Both its ubosot, the ordination hall, and its vihara, the hall housing Buddha images, rest on bases of distinctive gunwale shape, resembling junks. Its mondop,
a square building with a pyramidal roof, has beautifully carved wooden door panels. Located in the same province is the monastery named Wat Phra Phuttha Sihing. It is the home of a unique Buddha image made from pure silver, now preserved by the National Museum in Bangkok, with a replica at its original site. In neighbouring Rayong Province, the monastery named Wat Pa Pradu houses a 12-metre long Reclining Buddha; unlike other reclining statues, it lies on the left instead of the usual right side. Another unique, ancient Buddha image cast from an alloy of one of the baser metals and gold, created late in the Ayutthaya Period, is housed in the monastery known as Wat Thong Thua, in Chanthaburi Province. There, two Ayutthaya-style pagodas and a Thai-style wooden pavilion in the monastery named Wat Phlap date from the same period, presumably built in 1757. In the old town of Chanthaburi, there on the west bank of the Chanthaburi River, the first Roman Catholic Church was built in 1711, through the efforts of Catholic refugees from Annam who had found refuge in Siam during the 17th century.

The area around Chanthaburi has especial historic significance as the stronghold where soldiers were recruited, a fort built, supplies stocked, equipment and weapons manufactured, and boats built to launch a military campaign under the leadership of Phraya Vachirapranak. He successfully led his army to wrest control over the central area of Siam from the Burmese invaders, established Siam’s new capital in Thon Buri on the west bank of the Chao Phraya River, and ascended to the throne as King Tak Sin [1767-1782]. This short, decisive period of some six months is annually commemorated through a celebration at the Tak Sin Fort, a nonagon structure crowned by a steeply pointed roof.

In neighbouring Trat Province, the monastery named Wat Yotha Nimit was founded during the reign of King Tak Sin. Further north, in present-day Chachoengsao Province, the monastery known as Wat Sampathuan was built during that reign.

A cannon from the reign of King Rama III
In the First Reign [1782-1809] of the Royal House of Chakri, the monastery called Wat Thong Thua in Chanthaburi Province was built. For its construction the ruined site of an ancient Khmer sanctuary was chosen. It not only rests on that foundation but also preserves artefacts of the 12th to 13th centuries in its old ubosot. They include Khmer-style sculptures such as lintels and sandstone door colonettes carved in various designs, which are firmly integrated into the extant building, and stone inscriptions.

Strategic considerations led King Rama III [1824-1851] to order the construction of a whole string of fortifications in the coastal plains. The critical year was 1834, when work was carried out simultaneously at various locations so as to avert any designs of the ruler of Annam on Siam’s eastern region. Then the city wall of Chachoengsao Town was built.

Particularly the town of Chanthaburi was under acute threat. The entire town was relocated onto higher and safe ground, known as Noen Wong Fort. It was constructed using laterite from the wall of the old town known as Ban or Mueang Phaniat, situated at close distance in the plain below. This stronghold encompassing the military base and the town, with an already existing city pillar, lak mueang in Thai, erected in the reign of King Tak Sin and the monastery named Wat Yotha Nimit of that reign, covered an area of 43 hectares. The laterite walls were mounted with large cannons. Each side had its own rampart and defensive moat.

To safeguard against an invasion from the seaside, the estuary of the Chanthaburi River was secured through the construction of the Phairi Phinat Fort on top of the Laem Sing Hill, at 172 metres the highest elevation on the western peninsula. Facing it across the narrow channel of the river mouth, the Phikhat Patchamit Fort was built on the site which, after its alteration later on, has become known as Tuek Daeng. In the course of enhancing security, the old Catholic Church in the deserted town was demolished and a new one built on the east bank, in 1834 as well.

Four monasteries were built or restored during the Third Reign. Built simultaneously with the city wall of Chachoengsao was the
monastery called Wat Mueang, later named Wat Pitulathiraj Rangsarit. It was restored after being burnt down during a Chinese rebellion in 1848. In nearby Chon Buri Town, the ubosot of the old monastery named Wat Yai Inthraram was renovated using glass-ware to adorn its gables and windows. Another ubosot, that one of Wat Phai Lom in Chanthaburi Province, was embellished with mural paintings portraying the life story of Lord Buddha, and enhanced with Chinese floral designs and scenes featuring foreigners. The monastery of Wat Yotha Nimit in Trat Province, built in the reign of King Tak Sin and fallen into disrepair, was reconstructed.

King Rama V [1868-1910] had royal residences built on the mainland and on an island in present-day Chon Buri Province. At Ang Sila, a fishermen’s settlement, a European-style summer palace was built at the waterfront. On Ko Sichang, a large island, stands the summer palace named Phra Chuthathut Rachathan. It is constructed from teak wood in the gingerbread style. The octagonal edifice in mixed Thai-Western style and a pier with jetty are set in beautifully landscaped grounds. Nearby is the Mondop Roy : Phra Phuttha Bat built by royal command, as is the sunset watching pavilion on the boulder coastal strip named Chong Khao Khat. Further south, a severe drought necessitated the relocation of the town of Chanthaburi, for security reasons shifted onto high ground and known as Noen Wong Fort, to the original site by the Chanthaburi River. In the pristine surroundings of the Phlio – Khao Sa Bap National Park, a pyramid built by royal command faces the cascades, and a chedi flanks the steep, dramatic step over which the mighty torrent plunks into a large and deep basin. Locally called Phra Nang Ruea Lom Pyramid, it is a memorial in which the ashes of the Royal Consort Sunantha Kumarirat are enshrined. The inscription on the Cathedral of the Virgin St. Mary’s Immaculate Conception, Chanthaburi Province
marble slate expresses the King’s sorrow for her untimely death, drowned after a royal boat had capsized in the Chao Phraya River at the Bang Pa-in Summer Palace.

Two exceptional monasteries were built in Chon Buri Province. Wat Sattahip houses in its ubosot a unique image of a revered monk cast by the worshippers themselves. Wat Tai Ton Lan is remarkable for the local craftsmanship that created the wooden instruction hall, the library in a pond built from teak wood, and the swan pillars. The floor of the ubosot is covered with old tiles from China, and stone giants guard it.

During the Fifth Reign [1868-1910], the French Colonial Empire tightened its grip on neighbouring territories, called Indochina, and posed a threat to Siam’s territorial integrity. At the turn of the 19th century, the French occupied the present-day province of Chanthaburi, the island named Ko Sichang off the coast of Chon Buri Province [both 1893-1904], and the province of Trat [1893-1907]. To commemorate the withdrawal of the French occupants and regaining of sovereignty over these areas, a chedi was constructed, in 1904, at the site of the Phairi Phinat Fort, built in the Third Reign on top of the Laem Sing Hill.

From the Chanthaburi twelve years when the French had subdued Chanthaburi [sipsong pi muea farangset yuet chanthaburi in Thai], some colonial-style structures and numerous architectural and design features are preserved. In Chanthaburi Town, the French occupation force headquarter and its arsenal are situated in the grounds of the Tak Sin Military Camp. There also is the prison tower called Khuk Khi Kai, built at the start of the French occupation, in 1893, to hold rebellious locals. It is a 7-metre high, square-shaped dungeon, built in bricks, measuring 4.4 metres each side, with walls holed for ventilation and a porous roof said to have been used as a chicken coop.
At the site of the Phikhat Patchamit Fort, built in the Third Reign, the structure was turned into a military command post and living quarters by the French. Owing to its appearance, it is known as the *Tuek Daeng*, the red building.

In the southernmost province of Trat, the residence built by Phra Chin Pracha Bodi, the royally appointed governor, served as the residence of the French governor, after the French withdrawal from Chanthaburi and until the withdrawal from Trat, in 1907. It is known as the *Residan Kampot*. Since 1928, it serves as residence of the governor of Trat Province.

The likely eldest, existing monastery in Trat Province, Wat Buppharam built in 1648, was restored and enlarged by constructing buildings in the Rattanakosin architectural style. Its *ubosot* has mural paintings and in its *vihara* Buddha images in the Rattanakosin style.

The visit by King Rama V to Prachin Buri Province in 1908 is documented through His Royal Signature, *Boran Sathan Lai Phra Hat*, on the wall of a shrine dedicated to a Hindu God in the ancient Dong Si Maha Phot Sanctuary.

The most extraordinary edifice, whose construction began in 1906 and was completed in 1909, five years after the French occupation, is the Cathedral of *The Virgin St. Mary's Immaculate Conception* in Chanthaburi. It was built on the site of the church that had been relocated there in 1834, upon the demolition of the original church, built in 1711, on the west bank of the Chanthaburi River. The cathedral in Neo-Gothic architectural style is the largest Roman Catholic consecrated edifice in Thailand.

**ROYALLY INITIATED PROJECTS AND BUDDHIST SANCTUARIES**

The modern eastern region is an area of stark contrasts. Its coastline is dotted with fishermen’s settlements on the mainland as well as on numerous islands, with commercial
ports, among them Thailand’s most modern deep-sea harbour at Laem Chabang, Thailand’s largest naval base at Sattahip, beach resorts, industry clusters, and sites of educational institutions as well as research centres, while its hinterland is partly under cash crop cultivation, partly covered by forest, including nature reserves, and partly deforested, barren and drought stricken land, home to farmers eking out a meagre living. Gradually, they, too, benefit from the impact of the Eastern Seaboard development ventures.

Royally initiated development projects are focussed on sustainable livelihood. In Chachoengsao Province, H.M. the King had a Royal Development Study Centre established in the spectacular hills named Khao Hin Son. Earlier considered an unfertile area dotted with white rocks, experimentation and demonstration of integrated crop cultivation, livestock rearing and aquaculture have yielded positive results. The project area of 312 hectares exemplifies the potential for building productive upland communities.

Long stretches of the eastern shore used to be covered with forests of mangroves and associated vegetation, the natural habitat of aquatic and terrestrial wildlife. In one of the bays, located in Chanthaburi Province, the Khung Kraben Bay Royal Development Study Centre monitors the extent and degree of destruction to make room for large-scale shrimp farming, over several recent decades, develops restoration strategies, and launches rehabilitation programs. Gradually, mangrove forests are being restored, with the Royal Centre taking the lead. In this regard, the Khung Kraben Educational Mangrove Jetty has been instrumental in awareness raising and attitude change. The jetty makes accessible and visible the vital diversity of the mangrove habitat, with its trees such as Sonneratia [lamphu thale], Aegiceras [samae khao], Thai Cassia [samae san], Dalbergia
[kraphi], Excoecaria [tat tum thale] and Rhizophora [kong kang], complete with their associated fauna.

Upon Her Majesty the Queen’s royal initiative, the island named Ko Man Nai, one of the three islands that form the Man Archipelago in Rayong Province, has been developed into the Sea Turtle Preservation Centre.

To assist refugees from the strife-torn neighbouring country, Cambodia, Her Majesty the Queen had the Royally Initiated Thai Red Cross Khao Lan Centre [Sun Rachakarun Sapha Kachat Thai Khao Lan] set up in Khlong Yai District of Trat Province. There, support was given to the destitute and desolate refugees so as to enable them to engage in activities conducive to sustaining their livelihood. Once all refugees had left, the centre was transformed into a plantation of medicinal herbs with species from 36 provinces in Thailand, and a museum holding implements, tools and utensils used by refugees.

A similar botanical garden exists in Rayong Province, named The Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Herbal Garden, planted on nine hectares.

The Bang Kaeo Residence and Park, close to Chanthaburi Town, served as a royal home during the years 1950 and 1968, when Queen Rambhai Barni resided there. Among her royal initiatives is the revival of mat weaving from rush and related cottage industries. An avid golfer herself, she had on her estate a golf link created, one of the very first in Thailand.

The monastery named Wat Yana Sangwararam Wora Maha Wihan in Chon Buri Province, covering an area of 61 hectares, was built in 1975 to honour H.M. the King as its benefactor and two revered monks. Among its edifices are seven temples of varied architecture and interior decoration, in Thai, Chinese, Japanese, Indian, and Western styles.
Chiselled into the Chi Chan mountain side using laser beams, the cliff called Phra Phuttha Rup Kae Salak Khao Chi Chan shows a huge image of the Lord Buddha in the subduing Mara posture. The 130-metre tall image is shaped in the Lan Na style. Named Phra Phuttha Maha Wachara Uttamophat Satsada, it was created in 1996 to enshrine a relic of the Lord Buddha into the natural surroundings of the countryside in Chon Buri Province.

The sea-side city of Phatthaya, Chon Buri Province, has a unique, ornamental wooden structure. It is called Prasat Satchatham and was built by joining the wooden components without using any metal, in 1981. Its construction helped to keep alive a traditional Thai craft.

**CONSERVATION OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT**

In the largely dilapidated Noen Wong Fort and Town of Chanthaburi Province, built in 1834, a section is occupied by the Underwater Historical Treasure Research Station, built upon the restoration of the eastern part of the fort in 1973. Its work is focussed on the spotting of junks which sank centuries ago and salvaging their cargo. Objects retrieved, to date, include water goblets with lids; small-mouthed, glazed, earthen jugs; small jars; as well as human and animal figurines. These artefacts are of the old Sangkhalok style, which were manufactured in the kilns of Si Satchanalai in present-day Sukhothai and of Mae Nam Noi in Sing Buri provinces. Situated in the precinct of the same fort is the Maritime Trade National Museum. Its focus is on Thailand’s overseas trade relations throughout history. In one of its two buildings, the full-size replica of a seagoing junk is displayed, along with maps of trade routes and records of merchandise.

In the estuary of the Chanthaburi River, the Phra Chao Tak Boat Restoration Wharf, also known as the...
Samet Ngam Boat Restoration Wharf, comprises of several, historical basins where excavation has been going on. To date, findings include Chinese sailing junks of the Fuchian type and the rudders of boats which were 24 metres long and five metres wide. In a building at the site, miniature boats are on display.

**Ethnic Diversity**

The people of the eastern region were of several origins blended in a sort of melting pot, from which the present-day Thai population emerged. There are the descendants of the native Chong, of whom few only have retained their distinctive identity. Thai ancestors hailed from the country’s central plain. Malay fishermen established settlements on the shore. Khmer peasants made their homes near ancient sanctuaries. Refugees from Annam settled in the south-eastern coastal area. Lao captives, first, and immigrants, much later, settled in few areas. Kula or Thai Yai, also known as Shan, settled where deposits of precious stones were found. Chinese immigrants touched base along the coast, flocked to coastal towns, and moved onward to settle in towns and markets of the hinterland.

The large Lao speaking population, also known as Thai Phuan, in Khok Pip Sub-district of Si Mahosot District, Prachin Buri Province, trace their origin to people relocated from Sakon Nakhon Province in northeastern Thailand and settled in the year 1827. Living in rather closed communities, they have preserved their ancestors’ customs.

Another such group in Chon Buri Province, the Lao Hua Thanon hailing from Vientiane and Luang Prabang, had been settled, first, at the site of the present-day Phra Pradaeng in Samut Prakan Province, in 1827. Some of them moved on to Bang Pakong and, then, Na Phra That, before finally settling down in Hua Thanon Sub-district of Phanat Nikhom District.
The highly visible evidence of concentrations of people of Chinese ancestry are their places of worship, the shrines. Some of these, of great renown are the Chao Pho Khao Yai and Chao Mae Khao Sam Muk shrines in Chon Buri Province. There, the Chinese design and artistry of highest refinement are the characteristics of the Anek Kuson Sala, also known as Wihan Sian, built in 1987, in celebration of the King’s Fifth Cycle Anniversary. It has a tall statue of Chao Mae Kuan Yin, which was made from pale jade, and an art museum. Other examples are the monastery of Wat Mangkon Buppharam, also known as Leng Hua Yi, in Chanthaburi Province, built in Chinese architectural style, and Wat Buppharam, also known as Wat Plai Khlong in Trat Province, with its rich collection of Chinese porcelain pieces, donated by Chinese merchants trading in the east as well as Chinese traders granted refuge, since the Ayutthaya Period.

The Chong are native to the southern and south-eastern parts of the region. Their almost assimilated descendants live in the plains between Sattahip in Chon Buri and Khlong Yai in Trat provinces. Ethnic Chong still live in the mountain areas of Chanthaburi and Trat Provinces. Their language belongs to the Austro-Asiatic group of Mon-Khmer. It is still spoken by approximately 6,000 people. For lack of a written language, their identity keeps fading away. It is in numerous place names where it is preserved for posterity such as Sattahip, Rayong, Klaeng, and Trat.

The Catholic population of Chanthaburi Province is largely made up of descendants of Catholic refugees from Annam who had fled their native country during severe persecution and had been granted refuge in the 17th century.

The small communities of Khmer speaking people fall into two categories. There are those who descend from people at the time when Khmer-style sanctuaries were built and maintained as outposts of the ancient Khmer Empire to the east. They live mainly in Prachin Buri Province. Then, there are Khmer who are descendants of settlers during the period of the French occupation of the provinces of Chanthaburi and Trat, among them communities of the Islamic faith.
NATURAL RESOURCES AND PROTECTED AREAS

The variety of natural resources is great. While most resources do also exist in other parts of Thailand, some are rarely found elsewhere. Deposits of minerals in the category of precious stones are concentrated in the hills and mountains of Chanthaburi and Trat provinces. There, Siam rubies, also known as king rubies, of a purplish red hue without any stars, are mined, some of which are more costly than diamonds. Famous as well are the blue sapphires of a deep blue hue with six-angled crystal structure. One particular site is the only one worldwide with deposits of green sapphire, appreciated internationally as Bang Kacha Sapphire. There also are leaf-green emeralds and topaz across a whole spectrum of yellow hues. Spinelle, zircon and garnet, though inexpensive, are very attractive.

Owing to the tropical rain forest climate in the southern part of the eastern region, it is one of the “orchards of Thailand”, with plantations of durian, rambutan and mangosteen, to name some highly appreciated ones.

Bamboo groves in Prachin Buri Province with an especially attractive kind of bamboo, called Phai Tong in Thai, are known for a variety of subspecies. They are Tong Yai or Tong Mo; Tong Klang or Tong Chin, or else Tong Dam; Tong Lek or Tong Nu; Tong Lai; and Tong Khiao. They were originally brought to Thailand by Chinese immigrants who settled at a place named Ban Huo Khot. Once successfully propagated, they have spread all over Thailand.

Large patches in the coastal plain especially of Chanthaburi Province are naturally grown with a plant of
the sedge family \([\textit{Cyperaceae}]\). This rush, known as \textit{ya kok} in Thai, is the raw material for the weaving of a piece of rectangular shape that is about two metres long \([\text{one } \text{wa}]\) and about 50 centimetres wide \([\text{one } \text{sok}]\). Customarily, three such pieces are lengthwise sewn together to produce one mat \([\textit{suea chan}]\). Also, the half-product is used to manufacture such things as handbags and table sets.

Ang Sila, a fishermen’s settlement in Chon Buri Province, Thailand’s oldest beach resort, has remained famous for its cockle and mussel farming and its manufacturing of mortars and pestles from the locally abundant granite rocks.

Along some stretches of the shore, the natural vegetation of mangroves and associated trees, particularly of the species known in Thai summarily as \textit{samae} \([\textit{Aegiceras corniculatum} \textit{(Myrsinaceae)}]\) forest, have been preserved. Recognized as the main feed source for various species of marine life and its major breeding ground, other stretches are being rehabilitated. Examples are sites in Chon Buri and Chanthaburi provinces.

Several archipelagos are well-known for their coral beds or reefs. Among the many islands \([\textit{ko} \text{ in Thai}]\) of Trat Province, the Kut Archipelago and the island of Mak may serve as examples.

Nature reserves were established in mountain areas, in hilly lands, at the shoreline, and in coastal waters where islands cluster. They result in a representative cross-section that runs from the high mountain areas in the north and east to the under-water world of coral reefs in the sea. This rich diversity is preserved within the comparatively small area of the eastern region.

In the high mountains of Sa Kaeo and Prachin Buri Provinces, the Pang Sida National Park preserves diverse types of forests which, together, cover 95 percent of its area of 844 sq km. There, the Chong Klum Bon Nursery for Wildlife was established upon the advice of His Majesty the King to preserve endangered bird species such as the Siamese fireback, crested fireback, pheasant, silver pheasant, Kalij pheasant, great Indian hornbill, green peafowl, great argus pheasant, white-winged wood duck, yellow-faced green pigeon and lineated barbet. Other protected wild animals include the gaur, elephants, tigers, deer, common
barking deer, bears, boars, giant chameleons and fresh-water crocodiles.

Larger in area size is the Thap Lan National Park in Prachin Buri Province which covers 2,240 sq km. Inside this park, Thailand’s last fan palm forest is located, covering 96 sq km. In the past, young fan palm leaves were used to produce sheets, called bai lan in Thai, for the recording of eminent texts. Nowadays, villagers use the leaves to weave hats.

The Ang Rue Nai Wild Animal Conservation Area is thought to encompass the largest luxuriant forest in the eastern region. The entire conservation area of 1.030 square kilometres spreads out across the five provinces of Chachoengsao, Prachin Buri, Chon Buri, Rayong and Chanthaburi.

By comparison very small in size yet stocked with approximately 200 species of wild animals from Asia and Africa is the Khao Khiao – Khao Chomphu Nature Reserve in Chon Buri Province. Its area of 8,33 sq km is, indeed, an open zoological park.

The mountain area extending from the eastern part of Rayong Province into Chanthaburi Province, measuring almost 84 sq km, includes patches of virgin forest in almost pristine condition with a profuse diversity of vegetation. Named Khao Chamao – Khao Wong National Park, it has rosewood [ching chan / Dalbergia bariensis (Leguminosae)], prada [Dalbergia chochin-chinensis], makha [Ormosia sp.], makhia mong [Afzelia xylocarpa], ironwood [takhian yang / Hopea odorata], and eagle wood [kruesana / Aquilaria agallocha (Thymelaeaceae)], as well as various kinds of wild orchids, rattan, and ferns.

The Khao Khitchakut National Park in Chanthaburi Province covers a verdant forestland of 58 square kilometres. Its vegetation is of great diversity, including virgin mountain and deciduous forests, a great variety of herbal plants and wild orchids. Its likewise rich wildlife consists of such animals as the bisonis [krathing / Bos gauris], tigers,
bears, Malay sambar deer [{kwang} / *Cervus unicolor equinus*], barking deer [{keng} / *Cervulus muntjac*], goat-antelopes [{liang pha}] and numerous kinds of birds. The large Khao Soi Dao Nature Reserve in the same province extends over 745 sq km of mostly mountains covered with forest. The highest peaks are the twin mountains of Soi Dao Nuea and Soi Dao Tai, with the latter 1,675 metres high – so high that one can “pick” [{soi}] some stars [{dao}]. Its wildlife includes elephants, leopards, tigers, Himalayan black bears, crowned gibbons, and butterflies such as the blue crow and the forest white.

The southernmost reserve in the same province is the Phlio Waterfall National Park. It is spread out across 134.5 sq km of tropical rain forest. This is the habitat of such plants as sandalwood [{krathon pa} / *Sandoricum indicum* (Meliaceae)], khanun pan [{Artocarpus sp.} (Urticaceae)] and phim sen [{Pogestemon patchouli} (Labiatae)]. The protected wildlife species include boar, monkey, silver pheasant, common iguana, goat-antelope, mongoose, tree shrew [{kratae} / *Tupaia sp.*], Himalayan black bear [{mi khwai} / *Ursus torguatus*], gibbon, and various kinds of monkeys.

Another nature reserve on the mainland is the Nam Tok Khlong Kaeo National Park in Trat Province which covers an area of 105 sq km.

Given the mountain ranges and their headwater areas, there are many waterfalls.

Examples of spectacular and popular waterfalls [{nam tok}] are Pang Sida, Sai Yoi, Lan Hin Yai and Thapthewa in *Sa Kaeo* Province; Rue Nai, also known as Bo Thong, in Chachoengsao Province; Chantathan in *Chon Buri* Province, with torrents from August to November, most spectacularly at the fourth level; Krathing cascading across 13 steps, at most of them with a small basin, Soi Dao Nuea with 16 tiers, Khlong Narai, and Phlio – all four in Chanthaburi Province; as well as Khlong Phlu, Khlong Chao and Khlong Kaew in Trat Province, the latter waterfall with seven, equally beautiful tiers.

A littoral biotope is preserved in Chanthaburi Province, there within the boundaries of the Khao Laem Sing National Park, which comprises land, sea and island areas totalling 15.2 sq km. On the hill tops it has dry virgin forest and along the shores
mangrove forest. Trees include wild santol, eglewood [kruesana], wild almond [krabok / Irvingia malayana (Simarbeceae)], tabaek [Lagerstroemia flos-reginae (Lythraceae)], jambolan [wa / Eugenia cumini (Myrtaceae)], and tin ped [Cerbera odollam (Apocynaceae)]. Other than birds such as pheasants, wildlife includes the crab-eating monkey [ling sen / Macaca irus), mouse deer or chevrotain [krachong / Tragulus], and red-cheeked flying squirrel [krarok si som / Sciurus sp.). The coastal waters have beautiful sea-fans and corals which are the habitat of such animals as sea sponges, sea kelps, top shells, oysters, sea mussels and cockles.

Many islands off the coast of the maritime eastern provinces are included in nature reserves. The Khao Laem Ya – Samet Archipelago National Park in Rayong Province comprises of the islands [ko] named Samet, also known as Kaeo Phisadan, Chan, San Chalam, Hin Khao, Khang Khao, Kuti, Kruay, Pla Tin, and Thalu. Its area of 131sq km preserves rare plants such as wild lime [manao phi / Atalantia monophylla (Rutaceae)], khai tao [Solanum nelogena], khun thong phayabat [Hippocratea cambodiana (Celastra -ceae)] and red cajeput [samet daeng / Eugenia zeylanica (Myrtaceae)].

The islands are the habitat of wildlife such as various civet subspecies, mongoose (Mongos siamensis), crab-eating macaque, colourful squirrels, and numerous bird species.

The largest maritime nature reserve in the eastern region is the Ko Chang Islands National Park of Trat Province. It spreads across an area of 429 sq km and includes most of the Chang Archipelago with its 52 islands totalling 650 sq km. Hence, two-thirds of the Chang Archipelago are protected area, encompassing part of Chang and the islands of Wai, Lao Ya, Kradat, Mak, Ngam as well as the Kra, Kut and Rang Archipelagos. Among the spectacular attractions are the coral beds and reefs.
The coast of the eastern region has been undergoing rapid and, in certain aspects, radical change. Four factors are conducive to modernization. First, there is its geographical location at manageable distance from Thailand’s capital city, Bangkok. Secondly, the coast is also situated at a distance and in a direction which appears appropriate for the conveyance of natural gas from the gas fields in the Gulf of Thailand such as its largest and most productive, the Bongkot Gas Field. Thirdly, location and resource conveyance facilitate industrialization. The fourth factor is infrastructure, a necessity which was recognized as a strategic issue and resulted in the construction of highways, a railway line and a deep-sea port, as well as the transformation of a former military air field into a hub especially for air cargo and charter carriers.

The oldest, modern economic sector is the hospitality industry. From Ang Sila in the north to Hat Lek in the southeast, tourism took a firm grip of the mainland coast and the numerous islands. Prominent among the beaches are those of Bang Saen, Phatthaya and Chom Thian in Chonburi and Laem Mae Phim in Rayong provinces. Of the many islands [ko in Thai], some examples are called up here. They are Sichang and the four archipelagos [mu ko in Thai] of Lan, Phai, Kham and Samae San, all in Chon Buri Province. Off the coast of Rayong are the islands named Samet, Thalu, Chan, Kuti, Kruai, San Chalam, Hin Khao, Khang Khao, Pla Tin, Man Nai, Man Klang and Man Nok. Of the 52 islands in Trat Province, some are listed here as examples, including Chang, Kut, Rad, Mai Chi, Mak, Wai, Lao Ya, Kradat, Kra, Rang Yai, Rang Lek, Ngam, Khlum, Mai Khi Yai, Man Nok, Man Nai, Phrao, also known as Sai Khao, Rayang Nai, Rayang Nok, Thian, Thong Luang, Yak, Sam Phi Nong, Mapring, Tun, and Kampan.
On the island of Sichang, Chon Buri Province, there in the grounds of a former royal summer palace built in the Fifth Reign [1868-1910], the Aquatic Resources Research Centre of Chulalongkorn University is located. In the recent past, universities were established including Burapha University and the Asian University of Science and Technology. Satellite campuses were opened by Si Pathum University and Thammasat University. The Marine Science Institute is located on the Burapha University campus. Moreover, several boarding schools were set up along the coast. All these education and research facilities are located in Chon Buri Province.

Industrialization has brought about the most radical change. It is concentrated in the area which was officially demarcated as industrial zone and named Eastern Sea Board. Off-shore natural gas fields are the main source which fuels the formation of industrial estates. Gas separation plants produce methane used as fuel in power generation and for the manufacturing sector, ethane and propane used as feedstock for the petro-chemical industry, as well as propane and butane used as fuel in factories. Condensate is a downstream product, of which most is used by domestic refineries. In the development of Thailand’s manufacturing sector, outputs of plants in the Eastern Sea Board contribute to the rapid diversification and increase in volume of such subsectors as consumer goods, component parts, intermediate or semi-processed materials, and machinery as well as capital goods. Fastest growing in the region are the petrochemical and automotive industries. The latter has made Thailand the leading producer of automobiles and automotive parts with the biggest, vertically integrated assembly industry of Southeast Asia, and a large production base for worldwide export.

An essential component of the newly created, regional infrastructure is the Laem Chabang Deep Sea Port, designed to serve Post Panamax vessels. International sea transport has, thus, been greatly improved. This container port already handles, together with Bangkok Port, 90 percent of Thailand’s import and export commodities. It is the sole port-of-call for cruise vessels.
Kaleidoscopic Cross-sections

Western Mountain Ranges, Valleys, and Plains

Topographical Orientation

Mountain ranges dominate the western flank of Thailand, from the far north to the peninsula. Accessibility still remains restricted by the physical conditions that are characterized by high altitude, steep mountain slopes, mostly narrow valleys, brooks, creeks and rivulets gushing like torrents through waterfalls and rapids, dense vegetation, and wildlife including predators that pose a threat to human habitation. Cross-sections look like staggered silhouettes of mountains – hills – valleys – hills – mountains – hills in the interior, and like tapering silhouettes of mountains – hills – valleys – hills – mountains – coastal plain – estuaries – islands at the latitudes of the Gulf of Thailand, with the coastal plain forming a very long and, in parts, extremely narrow strip.

The largely rugged terrain has fewer sites that are suitable for human habitation than do by far most other parts of the country. Settlements, past and present, have existed along few routes that have been trodden in linking the vast plains, the Central Plain of Thailand and the plain beyond the mountain range and present-day international border, toward the west. The remoteness of the typically narrow valleys, best described as glens, secluded by high ridges is perhaps the major cause of their sparse population density, since historical times.
The best known among prehistoric settlements was discovered at a site named Ban Kao in the Khwae Noi River Valley. In 1943, the Dutch prisoner of war by the name of van Heekeren stumbled across some Neolithic artefacts, while digging the track for the railway line built by order of Japanese occupation forces in the direction of Myanmar. Systematic excavations yielded Stone Age tools such as axe-blades and utensils made from gravel, accessories made from shells, some earthenware, and human skeletons. There is evidence that there had been a dwelling of prehistoric human beings some 500,000 years ago, and onward into the Neolithic Period. This period is designated as “Feng Nio Culture” or “Khwae Noi Culture”. The archaeological finds are preserved and displayed at the Ban Kao National Museum, constructed beside that Neolithic burial site discovered first, in Kanchanaburi Province. Among other traces of early settlements in the same province are the cave paintings which depict people and animals, in either hunting or agricultural scenes. Western cliffs in the Khao Pla Ra No-hunting Zone of Uthai Thani Province are known for their prehistoric paintings in red colour depicting human and animal life.

Archaeological site in the Khwae Noi River Valley

1 All historical data, i.e. years and centuries, refer to the chronology of the Western Calendar.
Remains of the earliest civilization are the ruins of settlements and monuments from the Dvaravati Period in the two-pronged river basin of the Khwae Noi and Khwae Yai rivers, whose upstream reach in Umphang District of Tak Province is called Mae Klong, which is also the name of the river formed upon the confluence of the rivers known as Khwae Yai and Khwae Noi.

Between the Three Pagoda Pass in the headwater area of the Khwae Noi River, in Kanchanaburi Province, and the ancient site of Khu Bua, in Khu Bua Sub-district of Mueang District in Ratchaburi Province, a Dvaravati realm existed, whose culture was deeply influenced by Buddhism. The Mon people built the three pagodas which mark the pass across the watershed, the present-day border between Thailand and Myanmar. Towns such as Sangkhla Buri are located at the site of ancient Dvaravati settlements. Precious Dvaravati artefacts such as statues of Lord Buddha and the Hindu deity Vishnu, dated as of the 5th and 6th centuries, are preserved and displayed at the National Museum in Bangkok. Their blend of Brahmanism and Buddhism shows the influence of India’s Gupta Period [320-650]. They were excavated at the site of Phong Tuek in Tha Maka District of Kanchanaburi Province.

Khu Bua, an ancient site near modern Ratchaburi Town, was the social, cultural and economic centre of communities in the two-pronged river basin, during the Dvaravati Period. Its inhabitants were Buddhists. Remains total 44 structures inside and outside a rectangular moat. Artefacts include Buddha images as well as human, giant and animal figures, all made from terra-cotta. Considered as the oldest archaeological evidence of the Dvaravati Period found in Ratchaburi Province is the 2.5 metre-tall, bas-relief Buddha image in the posture of giving a sermon in the Ruesi Cave at Khao Ngu in Chedi Hak Sub-district of Mueang District. To the south, in the old centre of Phetchaburi Town, the vihara of the monastery named Wat Maha That Wihara Vihan has a large Dharma Chakra (Dharma Wheel) created in the Dvaravati Period.

One of the oldest religious structures
is the monastery of Wat To Phae in Khun Yuam District of Mae Hong Son Province. It is believed to have been built by Lawa people, at the time when Queen Chammathewi ruled the Haripunchai Kingdom from its capital city, Lamphun, at the turn of the 7th century, as evident from a Dvaravati-style pagoda. Thanks to its maintenance by Thai Yai villagers, this ancient monastery has been preserved.

Khmer conquerors occupied the river basins as far as to the downstream area of the Khwae Noi River, where they had a fortress built, known as Mueang Sing. Situated in Sing Sub-district of Sai Yok District, to the southwest of Kanchanaburi Town, it is believed to have been the westernmost outpost of the Angkor-centred Khmer Empire, from the middle of the 9th to the beginning of the 13th century. The total area size, consisting of four groups of ruins built from laterite, is 1.03 sq km. Its central complex, a square site surrounded by laterite walls, 880 metres in length, on an earthen embankment, with a moat alongside, covers 0.77 sq km. Prominent among the edifices in the Bayon style is the principal shrine, Prasat Mueang Sing. This grand Khmer temple complex and the military outpost were constructed during the reign of King Jayavarman VII [1181-1220]. The interior of the sanctuary houses a sculpture of Avalokitesvara. This is evidence that it was a Mahayana Buddhist complex. Among the other sculptures found at the site is the statue of Pratchaya Paramita, a female manifestation of the Avalokitesvara in the Mahayana Buddhist tenet. Moreover, there is a wide range of artefacts such as stone carvings adorning the buildings of

2 The Bayon style is a synthesis of preceding styles (i.e. Kulen, Preah Ko, Bakheng, Koh Ker, Preah Rup, Banteay Srei, Kleang, Baphuon, and Angkor Wat). It is characterized in the Buddhist temples of the late 12th and early 13th centuries. The temples are of complex architectural layout constructed at ground level and auxiliary structures including interconnected galleries and rooms. The sculpture of the Bayon style is best exemplified in the image of the Avalokiteshvara, which is identified by a small seated Buddha at the base of the crown. (Dawn Rooney, Angkor: An introduction to the temples, Hong Kong: Odyssey, 1999, p. 109)
the sanctuary, religious statues, implements, and pottery shards. The site was likely inhabited until into the 14th century.

Other ancient Khmer monuments in the area include the circumferential wall and 24-metre high tower or prang erected on a square base and built in the Bayon style inside the monastery of Wat Phra Si Rattana Maha That Wora Wihan, locally called Wat Na Phra That, in Ratchaburi Town. Its prayer hall or vihara, situated near the ancient prang houses Buddha images of the Dvaravati, Khmer and Ayutthaya periods.

Another such ancient monument is the monastery named Wat Maha That Wora Wihan in the historic centre of Phetchaburi Town. Construction of this monastery was begun during the period of Khmer rule. The ensemble of the cloister with one tower or prang and one small chapel each to the north, west and
south, a high ornamental gateway, *gopura*, to the east, and a central *prang*, though half-finished by then, was the work of Khmer artisans. It is an edifice characteristic of Mahayana Buddhism to which King Jayavarman VII [1181-1220] had erstwhile Hindu sanctuaries converted. Completed several centuries later, the central tower or *prang* rises to a height of 62 metres.

Of the same origin is the monastery named Wat Kamphaeng Laeng, also located in Phetchaburi Town. It was built as a Khmer sanctuary with five towers or *prang* laid out in a quincunx, of which four are left. They were dedicated to the Hindu deities Brahma, Shiva, Vishnu and Uma. Constructed in the Preah Rup style (early 11th century), known in Thai as Prae Rup style, and dedicated to Brahma, that Hindu sanctuary was transformed into a Mahayana Buddhist monastery in the 13th century. 4 During the reign of King Jayavarman VII [1181 - 1220].

### Consolidation of Thai Polity and Culture

The oldest, existing settlement in the mountain range probably is Ban Wiang Nuea, also known as Ban Don, in Mae Hong Son Province. It was founded in 1317 and served as an important outpost of the Lan Na Kingdom of Chiang Mai. Another such outpost in the same province is Wiang Yuam where, however, only its moats remain.

The oldest monuments, built in the Chiang Saen style, exist in the northern part of the mountain range. The monastery of Wat Mani Banphot in Tak Town houses a Buddha image that is dated as of the late 13th century. Of the same period is the lotus-bud shaped stupa with a multi-tiered umbrella, named Chedi Yuthahatthi. It is believed to have been erected to commemorate a battle won by the then Prince, later King Ramkhamhaeng. Further south, in present-day Kanchanaburi Province, there in the Khwae Noi Valley, King Maha Chakraphat [1548-1569] had a garrison constructed, following

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3 During the reign of King Suryavarman I [1001-1050].
4 During the reign of King Jayavarman VII [1181 - 1220].
the successful campaign against Burmese invaders.

Thereupon, sites along the Mae Klong River such as Ban Rai Na Thi and Khu Bua, both in Ratchaburi Province, were resettled with groups of Thai Yuan, also known as Thai Yonok. They were originally from Lan Na, where they had been taken captives during a campaign to repulse a simultaneous Burmese thrust in the north. Examples of religious edifices restored or built by such new settlers include monasteries famous for their Buddha images and mural paintings such as Wat Maha That Wora Wihan in Ratchaburi Province; Wat Maha That Wora Wihan and Wat Yai Suwannaram in Phetchaburi Province; and Wat Ko Lak in Prachuap Khiri Khan Province.

In Mae Hong Son Province of the north, the expulsion of the Burmese forces was followed by reconstruction. Examples are the fortification of Wiang Yuam Town on the order of King Kawila of Chiang Mai and the reconstruction of the monastery named Wat Chong Kham in Mae Hong Son Town, originally founded in 1827 and built by Thai Yai artisans.

Upon the foundation of Bangkok as the capital city, the rulers of the...
Royal House of Chakri placed emphasis on the reinforcement of territorial integrity at the country’s western flank. On the order of King Rama I [1782-1809], a fortified town was built at the ancient site of Mueang Sing in Kanchanaburi Province, to serve as an administrative and strategic centre of the area stretching toward the border with Burma, present-day Myanmar. There and in the surrounding area, particularly in the plain of the Mae Klong River in Ratchaburi Province, Mon refugees from the neighbouring Hongsawadi Kingdom were settled.

During the Third Reign [1824-1851], the town of Prachuap Khiri Khan, abandoned after the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767, was re-established. On hilltops above the town of Phetchaburi, known as Phra Nakhon Khiri, King Mongkut, also known as Rama IV [1851-1868], had a palace and temples built. In the town, the old monastery of Wat Yai Suwannaram with its unique, 300-year old mural paintings featuring mythical angels was chosen to resurrect a hall once standing in Ayutthaya’s Grand Palace. This hall is entirely built of teak wood and has exquisite wood carvings, especially on its door panels.

At great distance to the north, in Tha Sai Luat Sub-district of Mae Sot District, Tak Province, on the border with Myanmar, the unique Mahayana Buddhist monastery of Wat Thai Wattanaram, also known as Wat Mae Tao Ngiao or Wat Thai Yai, was built in the Thai Yai architectural style, in the year 1857. It houses a highly revered Buddha image which was transferred from Mandalay in Myanmar.

At the mountainside of Khao Sattanat in Ratchaburi Province, widely known as Khao Wang, situated in Don Rae Sub-district of Mueang District, King Chulalongkorn [1868-1910] had a palace built, in the year 1873. There, the King received the emissary of King Luis I
of Portugal, in 1877. In the Seventh Reign [1925-1935], the existing monastery of Wat Khao Wang was built in the former palace grounds. Two more palaces were built in the coastal area of Phetchaburi Province, during the Sixth Reign [1910-1925]. The seaside palace named Hat Chao Samran, constructed at the beach of Laem Phak Bia Sub-district of Ban Laem District in 1918, was dismantled soon after and re-assembled to construct the Maruekha-thaiyawan Palace, the “abode of love and hope”, further south in Cha-am Sub-district of the district of the same name. In the neighbouring Hua Hin Sub-district, part of the district of the same name in Prachuap Khiri Khan Province, King Prachathipok, also known as Rama VII [1925-1935] had a sea-front residence built. Construction of this residence, named Klai Kangwon Palace, began in the year 1926. It has served as a royal residence throughout the present reign, from 1946 onward. An entirely different structure built in the Sixth Reign [1910-1925] is the Hua Hin Railway Station, one of the most attractive such stations in the country.

**AMAZING NATURAL ENVIRONMENT**

High mountain ranges run almost in a straight line, from the northernmost point in Thailand down south onto the peninsula. The westernmost range named Tanao Si is shared between Thailand and Myanmar. Running parallel in Thailand are three ranges. They are called, from the west with most of the high mountains, the Thanon Thong Chai Tawan Tok, Thanon Thong Chai Ton Klang and Thanon Thong Chai Tawan Ok ranges. Overall, the ruggedness of the terrain is greatest in the north where Mae Hong Son Province is located, and somewhat balanced by the coastal plain along the Gulf of Thailand, with its mountainous hinterland in the provinces of Rat-chaburi, Petchaburi and Prachuap Khiri Khan.

In the limestone mountain areas, caves abound. In some caves, cliff drawings or paintings, archaic tools, fragments of earthenware or human skeletons are evidence of how important caves were as shelter, very early in the history of humankind. In the mountains of Mae Hong Son Province with such important caves [tham in Thai] as Lot, Tukkan, Sao
Hin Luang and Phi Maen, the Tham Lot National Speleological Research Institute was established, situated in the Pai River Basin Nature Reserve and located in Pang Mapha District. The Lot Cave complex is a subterranean wonderland through which a brook runs that carries visitors on rafts from one mountainside to the other. In close vicinity are many more caves, including those named Pha Phueak, Pha Daeng, Pang Dam, Nam Tok, Su Sa, Pha Mon and Mae Lana.

In the south of the high-mountain range, there in the Chaloem Rattanakosin National Park, Kanchanaburi Province, several such caves have streams flowing through. Between Tham Lot Yai and Tham Lot Noi, the former and larger cave has limestone formations onto which worshippers had miniature shrines built and Buddha images placed. The Sai Yok National Park has a rather small cave, which is the habitat of the smallest subspecies of bats, weighing two grams and named Kitti Bat. Two more rather unique caves are situated in the mountain of Chong Phran, situated in Tao Pun Sub-district of Photharam District in Ratchaburi Province. The one named Phra Non houses more than one hundred Buddha images. The other named Khang Khao shelters an estimated three million bats which,
at sunset, make the mountain look like a volcano spewing thick, black smoke.

Naturally, this mountain terrain forms numerous watersheds and headwater areas. There are three large, though not equally extensive river basins in Thai territory. One such basin of tributary rivers is part of the eastern basin of the Salawin River in the provinces of Mae Hong Son and Tak. The largest basin of all is formed by the Mae Klong River, which originates in Tak Province, flows through Kanchanaburi Province, where it is known as the Khwae Yai River, and heads through Ratchaburi Province, where it is again known as the Mae Klong River, to empty into the Gulf of Thailand in Samut Songkhram Province. Of great importance is the Khwae Noi River, running the length of Kanchanaburi Province. It is the major tributary of the Mae Klong River. The third and smaller basin is that of the Phetchaburi River with its broad delta and estuary.

Plenty of brooks, creeks and rivulets run down the mountain sides, in many spots gushing across steep slopes and forming spectacular waterfalls. Few examples only are called up. The huge Mae Surin Waterfall in Mae Hong Son Province cascades over one hundred metres. Although in both Mae Hong Son and Tak provinces 70 percent of the area is at altitudes above 300 metres, Tak Province has many more spectacular waterfalls [nam tok in Thai]. Examples worth describing are many. Three are truly exceptional.

Thi Lo Su is considered the most beautiful waterfall in Thailand and among the six largest in the world, flowing from the altitude of 900 metres and gushing down some 300 metres across a width of some 500 metres. Phra Charoen is a breathtaking sight, cascading across 97 tiers. Thi Lo Cho, also called Sai Fon, has an upper cliff that is 80 metres high and creates a spray that veils its lower falls like rain. Other waterfalls called up here include the Se Pla, Pha Lat, Lan Liang Ma, Lan Sang – likely the most popular owing to ease of access -, Pha Ngoep, Pha Phueng, Pha The, Mae Ramoeng, Nang Khruan, Pa Wai, Sai Fa, Sai Rung and Thi Lo Re.

The southern reaches of the mountain range, in Kanchanaburi Province, have likewise well-known waterfalls. Examples are the seven-
tiered Erawan over a total length of over 1,500 metres, with one of Thailand’s stunning cascades. The seven tiers of the Huai Mae Khamin create high cascades that are most powerful and distinguished as follows. The first cascade is called “fern thicket” [dong wan], the second “turmeric curtain” [man khamin], the third “palace fronting the cliff” [wang na pha], the fourth “diamond umbrella” [chat kaeo], the fifth “fascination” [lay chon long], the sixth “Desmodium grove” [dong phi suea], and the seventh “deep shade” [rom klao]. Other waterfalls in Kanchanaburi Province worth mentioning are Kroeng Krawia with a most beautiful cascade, the large, cASCADING Dai Chong Thong, the huge Pha Tat, and the small but very pretty Sai Yok.

Hot springs exist throughout the mountain area. Examples are those in the Pha Bong and Huai Pong sub-districts of Mueang District and Mueang Paeng Sub-district in Pai District of Mae Hong Son Province; in Mae Kasa Sub-district of Mae Sot District and Huai Nam Nak Sub-district of Phob Phra District in Tak Province; in Hin Dat Sub-district of Thong Pha Phum District in Kanchanaburi Province; and in Bo Khlueng of Suan Phueng Sub-district of the district of the same name in Ratchaburi Province.
**Plant and Animal Wildlife**

Forests are the most expansive natural cover of the western mountain ranges. In the provinces of Mae Hong Son and Tak, major types are coniferous mountain forest and virgin, evergreen mountain forest. The latter also covers mountains in the west of Uthai Thani Province. In these three provinces, there are valuable hardwood forests of sal (Shorea) trees. Some mountain areas in Tak Province are covered with virgin jungle and deciduous tree forest. There, the tallest trees of Thailand grow, known as krabak, the lofty, hardwood (Anisoptera) trees. Some mountain areas of Uthai Thani Province have evergreen dry forests. The mountain ranges stretching from Mae Hong Son across Tak and Uthai Thani down south into Kanchanaburi provinces also have many areas covered with mixed forests of a great variety of trees. Deforested areas in the mountains of Uthai Thani Province have become degraded to savannahs. Mountains in Phetchaburi Province are covered with evergreen, tropical rainforest. Along the coast, particularly in Prachuap Khiri Khan Province, casuarinas are common. The shoreline of the provinces of Phetchaburi and Prachuap Khiri Khan is the natural setting of mangroves.

Examples of the many valuable trees growing naturally in the mountains are teak, with species whose colours range from golden to dark brown, and a very tall variant of Dipterocarpus, known in Thai as phluang, both common in Mae Hong Son Province. Valuable forest trees found in Kanchanaburi Province include redwood; ironwood (Hopea) used for the largest dugouts such as the royal barges; ingrin [known in Thai as rang], a very hard, very strong and very durable wood; a Bridelia species, named maka in Thai, which is rare and, hence, most valuable; and the tree called prada in Thai (Pterocarpus macrocarpus), with dark red heart-wood that is durable and not attacked by termites.

Few examples give an impression of the rich and varied wildlife. In the mountains of Mae Hong Son Province lives the rare serow, an ungulate with round antler tips. Further south, in Tak Province, roam the clouded leopard, civet, tapir and goat-antelope, also known as scrow. This animal also grazes in the
mountains of Uthai Thani Province, together with the gaur, wild buffalo and red ox. They are prey to the leopard and hyena. The mountain ranges in Kanchanaburi Province are home to one of the largest animals of all, the elephant, and to the smallest known mammal, Kitti’s hog-nosed bat, which weighs only two grams and is one of the twelve most seriously endangered species in the world. Among other animals are the gaur, deer, tiger, Sumatran serow, bear, giant Asiatic tortoise and Malayan giant frog, and a newly discovered crab species named *pu rachini* in Thai. As for birds in the mountain ranges, of the great variety few are called up here including hawks, partridges such as the Chinese Francolin, gallophesants, peacock-pheasants such as the green peafowl, bulbuls and vultures.

**Deposits**

Deposits of minerals in the upland areas are not yet fully investigated, owing to the physical nature of the terrain which would require big investment into infrastructure development. Given the government ruling that decreed the area south of the 11° N latitude an “open area” “for mining ventures with foreign majority shareholding and reserved the ”closed area“ to the north for Thai nationals, the bulk of investment and by far most mining enterprises have been concentrated in the south. In the mountain ranges from Prachuap Khiri Khan to Mae Hong Son provinces, mineral resources are, indeed, proven to exist. To a limited extent, though, only some are exploited.

Metallic deposits include tungsten, also known as wolfram, tin, zinc, antimony, lead, iron, copper, manganese, gold, and copper-sulphur compounds. Deposits of tungsten or wolfram, tin, antimony, iron and gold are known in Mae Hong Son Province. In Tak Province, tungsten, tin, zinc, antimony and cooper-sulphate compounds are found. The west of Uthai Thani Province has tin deposits. Tungsten, tin, zinc, antimony, lead and iron are found in Kanchanaburi Province. In nearby Ratchaburi Province are deposits of tin, antimony and lead. Tin, lead and manganese are found in Phetchaburi Province. Deposits of gold and tin exist in Prachuap Khiri Khan Province.
Non-metallic mineral resources include barites, fluorite, dolomite, feldspar, phosphate, gemstones, gypsum, marl, oil and oil shale. In Mae Hong Son Province, there is fluorite. Tak Province has deposits of barites and fluorite. In Kanchanaburi Province barites, fluorite, dolomite, feldspar and gemstones are found. Ratchaburi Province has deposits of barites, fluorite, feldspar and phosphate. Fluorite and barites are also found in Phetchaburi Province. Deposits of feldspar, phosphate and gemstone exist in Prachuap Khiri Khan Province. Oil shale is found in Tak Province. In neighbouring Kamphaeng Phet Province, oil is extracted from the Sirikit Oil Fields. Gemstones are found at the southern end of the mountain ranges. These are black spinelles and blue sapphires found in Kanchanaburi and zircon in Prachuap Khiri Khan provinces.

Harnessing of Water Resources

A large proportion of the rich water resources was harnessed through the construction of dams. Some of the newly created reservoirs serve one particular purpose such as irrigation for crop production, while others are of the multipurpose type, mainly for electricity generation and irrigation. In years of extreme rainfall, all reservoirs double as flood water retention basins. Virtually all these human-made lakes foster aquatic life, a resource that is tapped through fishery and used for aquaculture. At scenic spots, local tourism industries have evolved.

Among the many dams, including the so-called mini-hydropower plants, some large ones are named hereunder so as to highlight both the water resource potential and its use far beyond the mountain ranges proper. They include the Pha Bong Hydroelectric Power Station Dam across the Lamat River in Mae Hong Son Province, and the Bhumibol Dam, Thailand's first and largest hydropower dam across the Ping River in Tak Province. Kanchanaburi Province has several dams, notably the Vajiralongkorn Hydropower
Dam built from rock and concrete across the Khwae Noi River; the Si Nakharin Hydropower Dam across the Mae Klong River, known as Khwae Yai River in its respective midstream section; and the Tha Mueang Irrigation Dam across the Mae Klong River in its downstream section, which supplies a cropping area of 4,800 sq km that straddles areas in the provinces of Suphan Buri, Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Nakhon Pathom, Samut Songkhram and Samut Sakhon. The Thap Salao Dam in Ratchaburi Province created a scenic lake against the backdrop of majestic mountains. In Phetchaburi Province, the earthen dam across the Petchaburi River, named Kaeng Krachan, has formed a large reservoir. Its water is also used to irrigate the fields of once poor farmers who were resettled in the area of the Hup Kaphong Rural Development Project, initiated by H.M. the King in 1962, implemented with support of Israel beginning in 1964, and inaugurated in 1966.

**Nature Reserves and Protected Areas**

Large tracts of land in the mountain ranges, narrow valleys and plains of the western provinces are parts of protected areas, nature reserves, or national parks. Some of these sites are called up so as to convey an impression of their significance for the preservation of biodiversity and the conservation of the environment.

Examples in Mae Hong Son Province are the Tham Lot Forest Park with a brook running through a cave with access from two mountain sides; the Salawin National Park covering an area of 722 sq km; the Huai Nam Dang National Park straddling the boundary with Chiang Mai Province and covering a high-mountain area of 1,252 sq km; the Tham Pla – Pha Suea National Park with virgin mountain forest on 488 sq km; and the Nam Tok Mae Surin National Park with its unique wetland and wildlife reserve at high altitude, called *nong khio* in Thai.

Neighbouring Tak Province has the Lan Sang National Park covering 104 sq km with its eight magnificent waterfalls; the Tak Sin Maharat
National Park, formerly known as the Krabak Yai National Park, with evergreen forests and Thailand’s biggest, lofty and hardwood trees of the *Anisoptera* species, the tree known in Thai as *krabak*, on 264 sq km; the Umphang Wildlife Sanctuary, 2,589 sq km in size and part of a World Heritage Site, with Thailand’s most beautiful waterfalls; and the Nam Tok Pha Charoen National Park of 855 sq km in mountainous terrain. Adjacent to the east are the Khlong Wang Chao, Khlong Lan and Mae Wong national parks in Kamphaeng Phet Province. The Thung Yai Naresuan - Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary straddles parts of the provinces of Uthai Thani, Tak and Kanchanaburi. It covers an area totalling 5,775 sq km and is the largest, contiguous tract of wildlife sanctuary in Thailand and in South-east Asia as well. It was registered by UNESCO as a World Natural Heritage Site. Its south-eastern buffer zone of 317 sq km is the Phu Toey National Park with a forest of rare pine-trees, located partly in Uthai Thani and partly in Suphan Buri provinces.

Entirely located inside Kanchanaburi Province are 15 national forest reserves, five national parks, and two wildlife sanctuaries. The well-known ones include the Chaloem Rattanakosin National Park, Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuary registered as a World Natural Heritage Site, Erawan National Park, formerly known as Khao Salop National Park, Sri Nakharin National Park, Sai Yok National Park covering 958 sq km of rocky mountains, and Khao Laem National Park measuring 815 sq km.

The Sirikit Forest Reserve is a rehabilitation pilot project of H.M. the Queen’s SUPPORT Foundation implemented on 480 hectares of degraded land in Ratchaburi Province. Kaeng Krachan National Park with its unique virgin tropical rainforest on the highest peaks in the mountain area of 2,915 sq km covers parts
of Phetchaburi and Prachuap Khiri Khan provinces. The latter, a narrow, elongated stretch of land has nature reserves lined up like beads on a string. Examples are the Pa La-U section of the Kaeng Krachan National Park, the Nam Tok Huai Yang, Hat Wanakhom and Khao Samroi Yot national parks, and the Khao Hin Thoen Stone Park.

ETHNIC DIVERSITY

As seen from the northernmost headwater areas, non-Thai people living together with Thai people in Mae Hong Son Province include groups of Lisu and H’mong, both settled about one hundred years ago, and various Karen groups including Red, White and Long-necked Karen, the latter settled some twenty years ago. Another such immigrant ethnic group are the descendants of Chinese from Yunnan settled in the province’s tea growing hills. The Karen in Tak Province began to settle one hundred years ago. Soon after, groups of Lisu and Akha made their homes in locations at altitudes above 1,300 metres. Groups of the Yao or Mian settled in hillsides near water courses, at altitudes between 650 and 1,000 metres. Since the Second World War, H’mong and Mussur, the latter also known as Lahu, immigrated. The Karen in Si Sawat District of Kanchanaburi Province are the descendants of immigrants during the Ayutthaya Period. From the same period date the Karen settlements in the western mountains of Suphan Buri Province. Settlements of Mon people granted refuge by kings of Siam are concentrated in Ratchaburi Province. Today, their descendants form large proportions of the population in its Mueang, Ban Pong and Photharam districts. Another prominent group in Ratchaburi Province are the descendants of Thai people from Lan Na, who are known as Thai Yuan or Thai Yonok. Their greatest concentration is in Khu Bua District. Also from the far north hailed the Lao groups who settled in Phetchaburi Province more than one hundred years ago and are known as Lao Song. Karen villages dot the mountain range in Prachuap Khiri Khan Province, where they were established in 1983.

As stated in a document published by the Office of the National Culture Commission, “all these
The likely most publicized site is the track of the Death Railway, built by Allied Prisoners during the Second World War, especially the “Bridge over the River Kwai”, a replica of the bridge across the Khwae Noi River that was destroyed in an air raid by the Allied Forces, and the section of the railway track known as “Hell Fire Pass”, a long passage cut through mountain rocks.

Examples of the conservation of the built environment are taken from the two provinces of Kanchanaburi and Phetchaburi. The landmark of Phetchaburi Province is the Phra Nakhon Khiri Historical Park with the summer palace built by King Rama IV [1851-1868] and religious buildings. Kanchanaburi Province has sites that preserve remains of prehistoric times as well as of the recent past.

The Ban Kao National Museum is located at the site where the earliest traces of human habitat were excavated and preserved. The Prasat Mueang Sing Historical Park was established in 1987 to conserve an ancient built environment. The site with the Three Pagoda Pass has retained its strategic importance over the centuries, which is signified by its preservation. The old town centre of Kanchanaburi has some ensembles that remind of its past as an entrepôt along the route from the Central Plain to the western, mountainous border.

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WHERE the land base [ _chersones_ in Greek ] projects into the seas and is lined, along its northern half, by islands [ _nesos_ in Greek], the east coast of the Thai and Malay peninsula forms part of a rounded, virtual enclosure of a vast sea expanse. Historically, seafaring facilitated direct links. This waterborne communication and transportation evolved through a network of hubs and nodes along the surrounding coasts. In this historic scenario, the peninsula [ _laem_ in Thai] offered golden [ _thong_ in Thai] opportunities, as reflected in the eponyms of _Laem Thong_ or, in historical accounts, _Golden Chersonese_.

By official definition of the Southern Region, its eastern flank oriented towards and facing the Gulf of Thailand extends from 5° 37’ N to 11° 02’ N latitudes. Its length of 600 kilometres exceeds that of the western flank of Thailand’s territory on the peninsula by 200 kilometres. The mountain ranges dividing the peninsula lengthwise include the Phuket, Nakhon Si Thammarat (also called Nakhon) and Kalakhiri ranges. Salient features are presented in accordance with the numerical sequence of latitudes from south to north. This happens to match the expansion of trading posts in historical time, as they evolved and developed into regional centres, and ultimately served the foreign trade of Thai kingdoms of the Sukhothai, Ayutthaya and Rattanakosin periods.

Following the variation in overall characteristics of the eastern flank of the peninsula, by major physical criteria, within Thailand’s territory, which covers 50.600 sq km and is much larger than Denmark, three sections are distinguished. These are, by sequential latitudes, the lower, middle, and upper sections. The lower section comprises the provinces of Yala, Narathiwat and Pattani. Their combined area is 10.937 sq km,
which is larger than the country of Lebanon. The middle section covers the provinces of Songkhla and Phatthalung. Their combined area is 10.818 sq km, which likewise exceeds that of the country of Lebanon. The upper section encompasses the provinces of Nakhon Si Thammarat, Surat Thani and Chumphon. Their combined area is 28.845 sq km, which is larger than that of Israel.

**Physical Features**

There are a great many small rivers, few of medium length, and two large ones, Tapi and Pattani. Their extensive deltas are proof of the large amounts of silt which these rivers have carried from their headwater areas. The basin of the Pattani River covers 3,296 sq km. The by far larger basin of the Tapi River has a catchment area of 19,134 sq km. The Tapi River together with its tributary Phum Duang and the latter’s tributaries Tha Chang and Phanom formed the longer part of the transportation link across the peninsula together with the Pak Lao River which empties into the Andaman Sea. This historical “landbridge” is known as the *Pak Phanom* route, the “mountain orifice” or “mountain gateway”.

Characteristic of the peninsula, most impressive on the eastern coastal plains, are the solitaire and towering mountains, as well as small, isolated clusters of mountains. Prominent examples are Khao Chia Buri and Khao Ok Thalu, both in Phatthalung Province.

In the coastal plain and along the shore, three peculiar features stand...
out. One feature is the narrow, low-lying tongue of sand and shingle geographically known as ‘spit’. Another feature is the ‘triple’ lagoon north of Songkhla Town. Also, there are eight major bights. The ‘spits’ are formed by narrow land strips protruding into the sea yet bent approximately in parallel to the facing, inner coastline. Examples of long ‘spits’ are Laem Talumphuk in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province, Laem Pho with its cape jutting out into the sea named Laem Tachi in Pattani Province, and Dan Taba as well as Hat Narathat in Narathiwat Province. The lagoon can be likened to a string of three connected lakes, including the small Thale Noi, the large Thale Luang and the Thale Sap Songkhla which is linked to the open sea by a natural channel.

PREHISTORIC EVIDENCE AND TRACES OF EARLY HISTORY

Findings that attest to human habitat are dated as of 8,000 to 5,000 years ago. Corresponding artefacts were discovered at the archaeological site of Ban Mokhlan in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province. Testimonials of earliest contacts point to the Red River Delta and to Champa, both in present-day Vietnam, and to China. A ceremonial kettledrum, excavated at the site known as Khao Sam Kaeo in Chumphon Province, stuffed with assorted beads is deemed to be some 2000 years old.

During the 1st and 2nd centuries, ports for sea-trade came into existence. Examples are Taluban, now named Sai Buri in Pattani Province, Ketkai, Sichon and Khanom in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province, Tha Thon and Chaiya in Surat Thani Province, and Khao Sam Kaeo in Chumphon Province. In the immediate surroundings of these ports small maritime states developed. In the 2nd century Chinese visitors reported on their trade potential. Objects such as glassware from the Roman Empire as well as from the Indian Subcontinent, notably a religious statue bearing an inscription in Tamil language, and pottery from China shed light on the far-flung network in which the peninsular maritime states were nodes of trade and exchange. Traces of extensive trade during the 4th to 7th centuries include fragments of

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1 All historical data, i.e. years and centuries, refer to the chronology of the Western Calendar.
bluish-green Persian pottery and pieces of celadon pottery as well as ceramics of Chinese origin.

Around the turn of the 8th century, four major territorial powers had emerged. They were Langkasuka with its centre in Taluban, the present-day Sai Buri in what later became known as the Patani Kingdom; Sathing Phra with its centre of the same name, situated in the area which now is situated partly in Songkhla, partly in Phatthalung provinces; Tambralinga with its centre named Ligor, now called Nakhon Si Thammarat; and Chaiya with its centre of the same name covering the Bight of Ban Don and the downstream Tapi River Basin.

**Nodes of Asian Cultural, Commercial, and Tutelary Alliances**

In the southeast of the island of Sumatra, a powerful Hindu kingdom emerged in the 7th century, with Palembang as its capital. Until early in the 11th century, the Sivichaya Empire evolved which, at its peak, was “a confederated state of shared cultures”. Evidence on the peninsula includes Sivijayan inscriptions dated as of the year 683, remains of buildings, and artefacts. The sphere of dominant influence encompassed some former, small principalities on the upper peninsula which had been Khmer dependencies and the area of the ancient Chaiya; the principalities located in the central section of the peninsula such as Tambralinga and Sathing Phra, covering the southern part of the present-day province of Surat Thani and the areas of Nakhon Si Thammarat, Phatthalung and Songkhla provinces; and the lower peninsula with the historical principalities of Patani and Malayu. All these territories together with some on the islands of Sumatra and Java shared the Sivichaya Art, Brahmanism, and Mahayana Buddhism.

History of the upper section of the peninsular dates back almost 2,000 years, as evident from the “Milindapanha”², in which reference is made to Tambralinga and one of its centres, Chaiya. From Chaiya,

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² A Buddhist non-canonical work in seven parts written in elegant Pali, in about the 1st century. Its title means “Milinda’s Questions”. It is a compilation of great literary charm, recognized as a masterpiece of Indian literature.
Brahmanism spread during the 6th to 8th centuries. From the 9th to 10th centuries, under the suzerainty of the Sivichaya Empire, “Mueang Kharahi Chaiya” was the centre from which Buddhism of the Mahayana Tenet spread.

Also known by the name of its capital city, Ligor, the state of Tambralinga had under its tutelage some twelve small, adjacent states in the middle reach of the peninsula, while itself being under changing suzerainty, notably as a tributary state of the Sivichaya Empire, in the 11th to 12th centuries. The epithet “Mueang Phra”, ‘city of priests’, has been a designation of Ligor as well as Nakhon Si Thammarat since historical time. It refers to the period when it was a centre of Brahmanism.

In the period of Sivichayan suzerainty, the regional centre and port named Singha Nakhon or Sing Khon, also referred to as Singhora, grew into prominence. It was situated on the northern bank of the channel that forms the mouth through which the Songkhla Lake empties into the Gulf of Thailand. King U Thong of Ayutthaya defeated Ligor. Henceforth called Nakhon Si Thammarat, it became the regional centre of the Ayutthaya Kingdom.

Artefacts of the Dvaravati period were discovered at the site of the ancient town of Yarang in Pattani Province. Within the trapezoid-shaped earthen bulwark and moat with a fort at each corner, a terra-cotta Buddha stupa with bas-reliefs and terra-cotta Buddha votive tablets were found. Similar finds from sites in the provinces of Songkhla, Nakhon Si
Thammarat, Surat Thani and Chumphon are displayed in local museums such as plinths from the 7th to 9th centuries. In the town of Nakhon Si Thammarat, eminent examples of Dvaravati art are the standing Buddha image of Wat Mahathat, which was built, first, in 555 as evident from its Boromathat Chedi, and the remnants of 6th-century walls.

During the 6th to 13th centuries, the coastal area was part of the far-flung sphere of influence wielded by the Sivichaya Empire. The eastern flank of the peninsula is dotted with settlements, edifices, statues, sculptures and artefacts identified as Sivichayan in style. Examples of Sivichaya settlements are Sathing Phra, once a safe haven on the shore of the lagoon known as Songkhla Thale Sap and an important port, as well as Sing Khon or Singhora, the “Lion City”, both located in Songkhla Province. Of eminent significance was Ligor, once the capital of the tributary principality of Tambralinga within the orbit of the Sivichaya Empire and a major center on the Asian ocean trade route. Of greater historical importance is Chaiya, one of the oldest cities in Thailand. Its glorious past as a regional capital within the Sivichaya Empire was as its peak from the 8th to 10th centuries.

Examples of edifices are monasteries in Songkhla Province, there Wat Sathing Phra with the Phra Chedi Phrathan, an eminent example of authentic Sivichayan style. Of similar significance are pagodas or chedi in monasteries of the vicinity including Wat Khao Phra Ko, Wat Chedi Ngam and What Khao Noi. It is assumed that Wat Khian Bang Kao of Phatthalung Province was built, first, in the year 939, and one chedi there is dated as of the year 999. Probably older are the foundation of the most important Buddhist temple on the peninsula, Wat Mahathat, and the ruins of a town near Sichon, both in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province.
Two monasteries in Chaiya, namely, Wat Phra Boromathat and Wat Kaeo have preserved one stupa each originally built in the Sivichayan style. They are the famous and well restored Borom That Chaiya Chedi at Wat Phra Boromathat, and a ruined stupa at nearby Wat Kaeo, also known as Wat Long, which is a blend of Sivichayan, Central Javanese and Cham architectural features dating from the 9th century.

Examples of statues are found across the entire length of the eastern flank of the peninsula. In the precinct of Wat Khuha Phimuk of Yala Province, an archaeological site with remnants of the Sivichaya period, two statues are preserved, that of a Hindu deity dated as of the 8th century and a standing Buddha image in the Southern Indian style dated as of the 9th century. Stone Buddha images inscribed in the Pali language were found at the site of the ancient town of Yarang in Pattani Province. Among the precious statues of Wat Mahathat in the city of Nakhon Si Thammarat is that in the Sivichayan style of the Buddha seated beneath a canopy of serpent heads. The most famous such statue is the Avalokitesvara Bodhisatva, cast of bronze and found in Chaiya Town. It has been preserved in the Bangkok National Museum.

Examples of sculptures created in the Sivichayan style are kept in the precincts of monasteries. A sculpture of the Hindu deity Narai has been preserved at Wat Chonlathara Singhe, Narathiwat Province. Wat Khuha Phimuk in Yala Province holds votive stupas of the Sivichaya period identified as from Northeastern India. Votive tablets dated as of the 8th to 11th centuries have been kept at Wat Kuha Sawan, Phatthalung Province. A sculpture of the Hindu deity Ganesh from the 6th century is preserved in the Patsi Museum and various statuettes are kept at the ancient site of Tham Khao Pi, both in Songkhla Province.
The likely greatest concentration of Sivichayan-style sculptures, including those of the Buddha Sihing and of Hindu deities in their incarnations as Vishnu, Narai, Shiva and Ganesh, is preserved in edifices of worship (ho phra) of Nakhon Si Thammarat City. Sculptures of Hindu deities in the Sivichayan style as well as Buddha images adorn the courtyard with the Borom That Chaiya Chedi in its centre, situated in the compound of the monastery named Wat Phra Boromathat, located in Chaiya Town.

Artefacts in the Sivichayan style are numerous. Fine examples are those found and preserved in Songkhla Province. There are the ancient kilns of Khlong Pa O, where bronze statuettes were discovered, and the ancient site of Khao Ku Ha – Chomare with ritual stone relics. Mounts excavated near Wat Si Ku Yang and Wat Phra Chaidi Ngam contained pottery and bronze artefacts from an ancient site named Si Yang Chedi Ngam.

A bell-shaped pagoda in the precinct of Wat Chonlathara Singhe, Narathiwat Province, reminds of the strong influence of Sinhalese architecture manifest in Buddhist edifices. Other, rare such examples exist in Songkhla and Nakhon Si Thammarat. Atop Khao Tang Kuan, a hill near Songkhla Town a Sinhalese-style stupa or chedi rises. The towering, bell-shaped chedi in the centre of the ancient monastery named Wat Mahathat, also known as Wat Phra That Mueang Khon, was originally built in the Sinhalese style, as also reflected in the Sinhalese sculptures of elephant heads that adorn the cloister. This sanctuary in the ancient city of Ligor, capital of the Tambralinga Kingdom, turned a Siamese stronghold and named Nakhon Si Thammarat, has continually attracted worshippers from near and far.
Buildings of Chinese architecture as well as those blending Chinese with other styles attest to early contacts and the presence of descendants of traders who had established themselves in towns such as Yala and Songkhla. From among them, some families rose to local prominence, and members were ultimately appointed governors by the monarchs of Siam. The continuity of trading with Chinese ports is evident from finds of pottery fragments believed to be of the Sung Dynasty period (960-1279) in the precinct of Wat Chon-lathara Singhe, Narathiwat Province. In the ruins of Sathing Phra, Songkhla Province, pieces of Chinese pottery identified as of the T’ang Dynasty (618-908) and the Yuen Dynasty (1280-1368) periods were excavated.
Upon the conquest of Melaka by the Portuguese in 1511, Patani grew to its greatest power until in the 17th century. In decades of rivalry among the territories of Patani, Songkhla and Nakhon Si Thammarat, interventions by overseas powers, and fierce trading competition, Patani was weakened by four Siamese invasions in the first half of the 17th century. Patani was finally defeated in 1784, when it succumbed to another Siamese onslaught. From 1785 onward, Patani was a territory under Siamese suzerainty, corroborating its submission by paying tributes to the kings of Siam. The Siamese domination was not fully implemented until 1902, when administrative reform was introduced. In 1906, the Monthon Pattani was established. Thereafter, it was subdivided into four *changwat*, provinces, named Pattani, Banganara, now called Narathiwat, Sai Buri, now a District of Pattani Province, and Yala. In 1909, Siam signed the Anglo-Siamese Treaty, which resulted in the transfer of Siam’s sovereignty over the territories of Kedah, Kalantan, Trangganu and Perlis as well as the Langkawi Islands to Great Britain, with the
core territory of Patani remaining in Siam.

**BRIDGEHEADS OF TRADE WITH ASIAN AS WELL AS EUROPEAN INTRUDERS AND INTERLOPERS**

In quick succession, Portuguese intruders established trading posts in the region, first on Sumatra in 1509, then in the Patani Kingdom whose ruler granted permission to Portuguese merchants, in 1510, to establish their trading post in the already well established and flourishing port of its capital city. In 1511, the Portuguese seized the town of Melaka (Malacca). Authorized by King Ramathibodi II (1491-1529) of Siam, Portuguese merchants from Melaka (Malacca) started operating their trading post in the city of Ligor, present-day Nakhon Si Thammarat, in the year 1516. About one hundred years after the establishment of a Portuguese trading post in Patani, the rulers of the ancient kingdom granted licenses and concessions for the setting-up of trading posts in Patani to Japanese merchants in 1605, to Dutch merchants in 1609, and to English merchants in 1612.

Any such foreign powers’ designs on ports along the east coast of the peninsula to the north of the Patani Kingdom were initially frustrated by Siam, indeed, owing to fortifications such as Wat Phra Rachapraditsathan, also known as Wat Pako, at Sathing Phra, built 1548-1568, as well as Khao Hua Daeng and Pom Pak Nam Laem Sai. The ruins of Singha Nakhon, built early in the Ayutthaya Period, give testimony of Siamese suzerainty. All these sites are located in present-day Songkhla Province. Yet Songkhla remained another port deemed attractive by European seafaring merchants. Trading licenses and privileges were granted the Dutch, who established their trading post in Songkhla, then under the rule of Nakhon Si Thammarat, in 1612, followed by the French, in 1615.

**EMERGENCE OF THE SIAMESE POLITY**

Upon the founding of the Sukhothai Kingdom, in the 13th century, its sphere of influence extended onto the peninsula. For centuries the ports on the east coast of the peninsula have served as gateways of exchange. This trading network had been
firmly established by the time when the Sukhothai Kingdom made the transition from a landlocked territory to a maritime country by forging links with the Tambralinga Kingdom on the peninsula. Its flourishing ports eventually became gateways for Siam to the world, as well as for the world to Siam. By the year 1292, the town and area of Nakhon Si Thammarat, also known as Ligor, had been incorporated into the Sukhothai Kingdom. Ancient monasteries such as Wat Phra Mahathat were preserved and expanded by adding shrines built, over the centuries, in the Sukhothai, Ayutthaya or Rattanakosinsok styles.

In the Ayutthaya Period (1350-1767), the monasteries named Wat Mokhlan and Wat Nantharam, the latter also known as Wat Tai, were built at the sites of ancient Hindu sanctuaries in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province. Wat Nantharam has been very well preserved and is deemed the most magnificent of its kind in the South. The decoration of the facade of the monastery named Wat Khao Khun Phanom, located in the said province’s Phrom Khiri District, with Chinese ceramics reflects the cultural heritage of immigrants’ descendants. It represents the recent-most layer of artisanship on a monument that had been founded under Khmer rule as a Brahman sanctuary, was transformed to a Mahayana Buddhist temple, and has been preserved as a Theravada Buddhist Thai monastery.

In continuation of the city’s history as a regional economic hub, Muslim goldsmiths and silversmiths from the present-day Sultanate of Kedah in Malaysia were settled in Nakhon Si Thammarat, in 1804. Thereupon, the elegant edifice of the Yamia Mosque was built.

The port preferred by Indian, Persian and Arab merchants and known to them as Sing La, changed names and became known as Singha Nakhon, Sing Khon, Singhora, or Sathing. In the period of Sivichayan suzerainty, the capital of one principality as well as port named Sing Khon had grown into prominence, by the 13th century. Situated on the northern bank of the channel through which the Songkhla Lake empties into the Gulf of Thailand, at the site named Hua Khao Daeng, it was the early precursor of the present-day town of Songkhla. The ancient town, also known as Singhora, was captured by troops of the Ayutthaya Kingdom,
in 1678. Thereupon, the community was relocated across the channel, and the new city has served as Siam’s southern administrative centre, from 1790 onward. The 400-year old monastery named Wat Machaniamawat, also known as Wat Klang, originally called Wat Yai Si Chan, which was restored and renamed in 1888, render testimony of Siamese suzerainty, as does Wat Suwan Khiri with its murals painted during the reign of King Rama II (1809-1824).

The Thaksin Cultural Study Centre in Songkhla Province exhibits handicrafts that represent the fusion of Malay and Thai artisanship. Examples are *kris*, Malay daggers with ridged serpentine blades attached to elaborately shaped and decorated handles. There also are textiles hand-woven in the Malay tradition, especially fabric patterned like the shape of a local fruit called *phum riang*. Other examples include coconut-flesh graters shaped like rabbits, shadow-play puppets, costumes characteristic of traditional theater performances, especially elaborately choreographed *nora* episodes about a fabulous nymph of the forest, presented through tales, songs and dances, also known as *manora*, as well as costumes worn in traditional burlesque shows which are presented extemporaneously and known in Thai as *like pa*.

On the bank of the Che He River, also known as Tak Bai River, construction of the Buddhist monastery named Wat Chonlathara Singhe began in the year 1860. Completed in 1873, it features a blend of various regional architectural styles. The Siamese King’s insistence on retaining this Buddhist monastery within the territory of Siam was the decisive factor which caused the British to relent their demand that the border be drawn farther north, along the Sai Buri River. It is for this reason that Wat Chonlathara Singhe is also known as Wat Phithak Phaen Din Thai, located in Thailand and situated on the bank of the Tak Bai River which demarcates the international boundary.

In contemporary Thailand, the Royal Family has periodically taken residence at Taksin Palace, located on the Tan Yong Mat Mountain overlooking the Manao Bay in Narathiwat Province, since completion of its construction in the 1970’s.
ETHNIC DIVERSITY

Natural resources in abundance, both terrestrial and aquatic, have sustained livelihood on the peninsula, since time immemorial. Indigenous ethnic groups have formed a resilient population, out of which distinctive languages, cultures, economies, and socio-political entities evolved, which eventually merged, resulting in a unique blend of population. Distinctive facets include ethnic affinity, cultural heritage, religious affiliation, social tradition, and characteristic habitat.

The mixing of natives and people with ancestors from Mainland Southeast Asia as well as the East, South and West of Asia had occurred over many centuries, prior to the incremental incorporation of the area into the Sukhothai and Ayutthaya kingdoms, which has resulted in a variant of Thai population called Tamprue. They are concentrated in the provinces of Songkhla, Phatthalung and Nakhon Si Thammarat. In the 19th century, large groups of Malay from areas farther south and of Lao groups from areas beyond the Mekong River were settled in the upper section of the eastern peninsular flank, in the present-day provinces of Chumphon, Surat Thani and Nakhon Si Thammarat. Numerous landless people from Northern and North-eastern Thailand were also settled in the South, in the latter half of the 20th century. In Thailand’s southern-most provinces, the Malay have lived for over one millennium. There also are Malay communities in the middle and upper sections of the eastern flank of the peninsula. What all Malay have in common is their adherence to Islam. Hence, they are referred to as Muslim Malay, or Malay Muslim, or else Thai Muslim. The city of Nakhon Si Thammarat, the historical Ligor, and some towns in the province of the same name such as Ron Phibun are among the very few places outside Bangkok where Brahmins still reside. The inhabitants of Samui Island, administratively a district of Surat Thani Province, identify and refer to themselves as Chao Samui. They are the descendants of Hainanese fishermen and coconut as well as cotton traders who outnumber, by far, the indigenous Malay Muslim fishery communities.

The long-standing interaction
among ethnic groups and, ultimately, their mingling are reflected in the southern variant of the Thai language, a patois spoken as the regional *lingua franca*. This is known as *Tamprue (phasa pak tai)*. The language spoken by the majority of the Malay in the southern provinces of Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat and Satun is entirely different from the Thai language, in both its official, standard version and in its many regional, highly varied vernaculars. The variant of the Malay language spoken by the native population is called Chawi, also transliterated Yawi. This Malay vernacular is germane to large parts of Java, Sumatra and the southern half of the entire peninsula. The Chawi or Yawi language is written using classic Arabic script. History and geography made for closer contact between the centres of power of successive Thai kingdoms and the upper section of the eastern flank of the peninsula. Virtually all people are Thai speakers, though colloquially they may talk in the *Tamprue* vernacular or in their non-Thai mother tongue such as Malay.

**RELIGION**

The Malay have been Muslims since their rulers embraced Islam, beginning in the 13th century. It is particularly at the local level where the Muslim faithful feel the need to adhere to the tenets of Islam and to ensure that they will be upheld by future generations. The majority of the people in the middle and upper sections, particularly the Tamprue who identify themselves as Thai, live in communities, both rural and urban, with Buddhist monasteries as their religious and cultural centres. On approaching Southern Thailand from the north, the sight of mosques intensifies, indeed, as the distance travelled increases. The impression is one of peaceful co-existence of communities of the Buddhist and Islamic faiths.

**CULTURE**

In the lower part of Southern Thailand, where the ancient kingdom of Patani was once the centre of culture, the blending of the ancient Javanese culture with Hinduism left a lasting imprint on folkways. Examples of these traits are the
manufacturing of batik cloth, the building of ko lae boats, and the shadow play performances of Javanese origin. Batik fabric is manufactured mainly by Muslim Malay artisans in colourful chud chad patterns which are characteristic of markets such as Pa Las in Panare District of Pattani Province.

Another example of using patterns for ease of recognition is the building and use of the fishing boats called ko lae. Although the numbers of traditional boats and crews have been on the decline, ko lae boats are still in use, and new ones are being built. Just south of the estuary of the Sai Buri River, Muslim Malay boat-builders have upheld the traditional craft. Owing to the design and colourful decoration of these traditional fishing boats, the ko lae boat racing near Narathiwat Town is a spectacular event. Another unique event is a singing dove contest. Such singing competitions are held in several locations of the lower section and in neighbouring Songkhla Province. In its Chana District, a well-known such venue, countless cages with one male bird each are suspended from eight-meter high, metallic poles that look like giant shepherd’s crooks. Phatthalung Province has the reputation of keeping alive classical performances of the Nora or Manora, a Thai adaptation of an epic that originated in South India and is presented through intertwined tales, songs and dance.
Cultural diversity is likely most obvious in religious edifices as well as folk architecture. The oldest, existing Islamic edifice in the lower section is the Matsayit Krue Se, located in Mueang Pattani District. Its construction was begun in 1578 yet never finished. The Wadi Al Husen Mosque, also known as Matsayid Tulo Mano or Matsayit Sam Roi Pi (literally translated the “300-Year Mosque”), was constructed of Malabar ironwood, in the year 1624. It is an ensemble of two connected edifices that were constructed using exclusively wooden bolts instead of nails. Its present appearance, upon restoration in 1769, is a blend of Malay architecture with Chinese-style features and some Thai-style details. This well-preserved monument of the era of the Patani Kingdom is situated in Narathiwat Province. The central mosque of Narathiwat Town, Matsayit Klang, is an old wooden structure built in the architectural style that is characteristic of Southern Sumatra. Like the well-known Krue Se Mosque, the lesser known mosque in the Malay fishing community of Ban Dato on the peninsula,
or spit rather, named Laem Pho in Pattani Province, had long served as a religious centre in the Patani Kingdom. This old mosque is named Matsayit Dato. It was registered as a national historical monument in 1935. The central mosque of Pattani Town, Matsayit Klang, was built during the years 1954 until 1963. It is a modern structure with elements of the contemporary Arabian style though also reminiscent of the Taj Mahal in Agra, India. The overall design with a central dome and four smaller domes pointing to the four quarters of the world exudes a traditional appearance, an embodiment of historical, cultural traits enveloped in a green hue. This impression is reinforced by the large water basin in front of the magnificent edifice. It is Thailand’s second-largest mosque and, against the background of the historical Patani Town as a regional Islamic centre, the most important mosque in the Lower South.

Residential houses in rural communities of the lower section of the eastern flank of Thailand’s half of the peninsula are characterized by their elevated structure. They rest on posts with their ends slightly bending toward each other, causing the walls of the house to curve outward at the bottom and inward at the top. This type of house is described as built in the “style of the elephant passing water”. Along the bottom line of the gable of such houses is an extension of the roof, in some instances a cantilevered roof, called “bird’s wing”. The most common roof shape, referred to as Middle Eastern design, features three conjoined, triangular roofs with gables. Holes left by design to regulate air currents between floors at different levels and between walls and roof are called “cat’s path” or “wind’s path”.

The Lo Chut “Grassroots Museum” in Narathiwat Province is a repository of artefacts, none of which are less than 1,000 years old. They include ceramic as well as brass pots and bowls and Malay daggers known as kris.

The majority of people in the lower section, who identify themselves as Thai, live in communities with Buddhist monasteries as their religious and cultural centres. The likely most prominent Buddhist monastery is Wat Chonlathara Singhe, also known as Wat Phithak Phaendin, in Tak Bai District of
Narathiwat Province. Built during the years from 1860 until 1873, this monastery is a unique ensemble of edifices, statues, and decorative features. Among the buildings in Sumatran, Chinese and local architectural styles are four distinctly different prayer halls, called vihara in Thai. One vihara, constructed of wood in the style typical of Southern Sumatra, resembles a mosque and likely is the oldest edifice. It houses a sculpture of the Hindu deity Vishnu. Another vihara is decorated with murals painted during the Fourth Reign (1851-1868). The construction of the vihara housing a reclining Buddha image, which is embellished with Chinese ceramics in the style of the Song Dynasty Period, was completed in 1873. The fourth vihara is a large building in the authentic Thai style.

Old urban Buddhist communities had emerged in the course of population growth due to immigration. This is evident from the Sino-Thai temple architecture in cities such as Songkhla. Examples are Wat Matchimawat and Wat Chaeng. Wat Matchimawat was originally built some 400 years ago, when the Ayutthaya Kingdom tightened control over the port of Songkhla, and named Wat Yai Si Chan in commemoration of the donor of construction funds. Its existing chapel, ubosot, was built in the Thai-Chinese style during the First Reign (1782-1809). In the Third Reign (1824-1851) and the Fourth Reign (1851-1868) restoration works were carried out. By then, the murals were created that depict 19th-century life in Songkhla and episodes from the Jataka, similar to those of Wat Phra Sri Rattana Satsadaram, widely known as Wat Phra Kaeo or Temple of the Emerald Buddha, in Bangkok.

A common feature of cities, towns and markets are the Chinese shrines and association buildings. Examples of well-known shrines are San Chao Leng Chu Kiang, also known as San Chao Mae Lim Ko Liao, in Pattani Province and San Chao Mae To Mo in Narathiwat Province. Nakhon Si Thammarat has two well-known Chinese-style, religious edifices in Buddhist monasteries. One is situated in the compound of Wat Chaeng. Known as Keng Chin Wat Chaeng, it is a brick structure in the shape of a lotus bud. A similar edifice is known as Keng Chin Wat Pradu, owing to its location in the com-
pound of the city’s monastery called Wat Pradu. Old enterprise premises and residences in the Sino-Portuguese style set elegantly contrasting accents in the historic centres of cities and towns. One of the finest examples of Sino-Portuguese architecture is the ensemble of buildings which houses the Songkhla National Museum.

As stated in a document published by the Office of the National Culture Commission, “all these ethnic groups are fully assimilated and consider themselves Thais.”

**Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation**

Examples of nature reserves and national parks in marine and littoral areas are the Yaring Mangrove Bioscience Study Centre and its nature trail in Pattani Province and the Manao Bay Forest Reserve in neighbouring Narathiwat Province, which protects a rare beach forest. In the same province, the To Daeng Peat Swamp Forest is a unique ecosystem, with the Sirindhorn (To Daeng) Peat Swamp Forest Research and Study Centre. Very well known, far beyond the middle section of the peninsula, is Thailand’s first no-hunting zone, established in 1975. Named the Thale Noi Waterfowl Sanctuary, it straddles parts of Phatthalung, Songkhla and Nakhon Si Thammarat provinces. Its terrestrial segment encompasses peat forests, grasslands and paddy lands that surround wetlands and the lake named Thale Noi. This lake is the northernmost and smallest of three lakes that form the inland lagoon. The others are known as Thale Luang and Thale Sap Songkhla. In the southwestern part of the largest lake, Thale Luang, another reserve
was established. Named Khu Kut Waterfowl Non-hunting Zone, it straddles parts of Songkhla and Phatthalung provinces.

Nature reserves and national parks in the marine and littoral areas of the upper section include both islands and shore stretches of the peninsula. The Khanom Archipelago National Park comprises islets, reefs and shore as well as mountain areas in Nakhon Si Thammarat and Surat Thani provinces. Exclusively islands form the Ang Thong Archipelago National Park. Over a sea area of 250 sq km, 42 islands and islets are scattered with a combined land mass of 50 sq km. The northernmost protected area with islands and shores in the upper section is the Chumphon Archipelago National Park. To preserve one of few remaining swamp forest ecosystems in coastal and river plains, the Thung Thong Swamp Forest No-hunting Zone comprising mostly wetlands was demarcated in Surat Thani Province.

Most protected areas are located in the hills and mountains. These are the Pa Hala – Bala Wildlife Reserve and the Bu Do – Su Ngai Pa Di National Park in Yala and Narathiwat provinces; and the Sai...
Pa Hala – Bala Wildlife Reserve in Yala Province

Khao Luang National Park in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province
Khao Waterfall National Park straddling parts of the provinces of Pattani, Yala and Songkhla. One of the largest nature reserves encompasses a big section of the Nakhon Range. It is named Pu–Ya Mountains National Park covering parts of the provinces of Phatthalung, Nakhon Si Thammarat and Trang. Eleven examples in the upper section include the Khao Luang, Khao Nan, and Yong or Yong Sai Yai Waterfall national parks in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province, as well as part of the Si Khi Waterfall National Park straddling the boundary with Surat Thani Province. Located in the latter are the Phanom River, Khao Sok and Tai Rom Yen national parks. The name of the latter seems to signify that virgin mountain forests and rainforests keep its area in “cooling shade” (rom yen). Its name is, however, a reminder of the recent past when the Communist Party of Thailand maintained a command base around Khao Chong Chang, until its cadres’ peaceful surrender under the Tai Rom Yen, the “Welcoming into the Cooling Shade” strategy successfully implemented by the Royal Thai Government.
In the same province, the Khao Tha Phed Forest Reserve encompasses the Khao Tha Phet Wildlife Preservation Centre. Neighbouring Chumphon Province has the Khao Phang and Kapo Waterfall forest reserves as well as the Khlong Phrao National Park.

**Conservation**

A distinctive type of combined forestry and horticulture in the river plains, hills and mountains of the lower and middle sections is known as *dusong* in Malay and as *sum rum* in Thai. The traditional practice is based on indigenous knowledge and local wisdom, encapsulated in the principle of living in harmony with the forest. Naturally growing trees are interspersed with cultivated perennial trees. Some orchard trees are more than one hundred years old. Vegetables are grown in these mixed forests and orchards, which are ecologically well-balanced within themselves. Wild birds eradicate harmful insects. Foliage shed by forest trees cover the topsoil, maintain soil moisture, and by rotting become natural fertilizer. The *sum rum* or *dusong*, combined forests and orchards, produce year-round yields of vegetables and fruits.

Local people’s indigenous knowledge is, likewise, exemplified by the community of fruit orchard farmers at Ban Plai Uan in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province. By adjusting to the natural forest vegetation and adopting a method of planting fruit trees mixed with naturally growing plants alongside a trail through the natural forest, they have practiced a distinctive type of combined forestry and horticulture similar to the traditional horticulture called *sum rum* in the middle and *dusong* in the lower sections of Southern Thailand.

**Traditional Sources of Livelihood**

Southern Thailand as a whole has been characterized as endowed with an “abundance of natural resources”, as follows:

“Situated by the sea, the southern provinces are rich in natural resources. The soil is richer compared to the rest of the country, and the region is also wealthy in its forests. People can grow many crops and fruits which
are impossible in other areas.”

In the experience of a successful entrepreneur, who had moved from Nakhon Pathom in Western Thailand to Had Yai City, “minerals, rubber, fishery, and agriculture are better than in the central and northern parts of Thailand”.

In the marine and littoral areas fisheries and related activities have been a major source of livelihood. Owing to the lower section’s long coast with very few islands at distances that are navigable for the traditional fishing boats known as ko lae, by far most fishing communities have been engaged in coastal-water fishery. There is a saying in the fishing communities of Narathiwat, formerly named Bang Nara, that “for Bang Nara people not having ko lae boats would be like going fishing naked”. These attractively embellished ko lae boats are still being built in coastal villages. Especially on the shores of the three lakes of Thale Sap Songkhla, Thale Luang and Thale Noi, which form the Songkhla Inland Lagoon, fisheries and related products have been a major source of livelihood in the middle section. Owing to the upper section’s marine environment consisting of a long coast with a large number of islands, big and small, the fishing communities have been
engaged in both coastal-water and deep-water fisheries. Aquaculture especially for the production of a great variety of shell fish has, since long, been practiced in the Bight of Ban Don, Surat Thani Province. Processing their catches, members of the fishing communities produce a host of food stuff and condiments, including dried shrimp, fish sauce, fish paste, and biscuits made from rice mixed with either shrimp or fish.

Bird’s nests (i.e. nests built by swiftlets [edible-nest swiftlet \( \text{Aerodramus fuciphagus} \), not swallows as commonly and erroneously perceived) are a highly valued commodity in great demand, which no longer are just collected but “grown” rather by building structures designed to attract the birds and entice them to build their nests.

The four components of agriculture practiced in the lower section are field cropping, plantation crop production, livestock rearing, and horticulture. The common field crop is paddy, distinguished as rainy-season or first rice crop and off-season or second rice crop. In the middle and upper sections, peanuts and melons are grown, as well as pineapple in the upper section. Examples of plantation crops are rubber, coconut, areca nut, sugar palm, oil palm, coffee, cocoa, mangosteen, lime, mango, durian, rambutan, longkong, langsat, banana, oranges, sweet rakam, also known as sala, and cashew nut. Livestock include such species as buffalo, cattle, goat, sheep, pig, chicken, duck, quail, dove, horse, elephant, and freshwater as well as saltwater aquatic animals.

Horticulture in combination with forestry, a traditional practice which is known as \textit{dusong} in Malay and \textit{sum rum} in Thai (see the detailed description under the heading of “conservation” above), is practiced to grow perennial trees interspersed with vegetables and produce \textit{longkong} or \textit{duku}, durian, rambutan, \textit{sato} (\textit{Parkia sp.}), pomelo, jackfruit, tamarind and kapok. In the middle section a fruit tree is grown called \textit{champada} in the vernacular of Ko Yo; it is similar to jackfruit though smaller in size, with a thick peel and sweet, yellowish-red meat. The jaggery palm, also known as wine palm or toddy palm, is grown in the upper section. In a similar vein, the Chang Klang Agro-tourism Centre in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province demonstrates and promotes
integrated farming. The five major components are rubber tree planting, vegetable growing, ornamental plant cultivation, mushroom production, and apiculture.

The prudent use of forest resources has several components, including the conservation of such vital vegetation as tropical evergreen dry as well as rain forests and swamp, beach and peat forests, and the sustainability of forestry. Among the non-timber forest products (NTFPs) extracted from forests are incense wood, firewood, rattan, resin or dammer, gamboge, guta-percha, tree oil and sap, bee wax, cardamom, jelutong, which is in high demand for the production of chewing gum, indigo, bamboo and thatch.

Raw materials available in the lower section have been used for the manufacturing of a large assortment of handicrafts. In fishing communities, miniature ko lae fishing boats are made for sale as souvenirs to visitors. Bulrush, pandan tree leaves and screwpine fibres are worked into such items as spectacle holders and handbags. There are artisans specialized in producing trays decorated with scrollwork, as well as plates and assorted household utensils summarily known as khrueang thong kueang. Fibres of creepers or vines are split lengthwise to get strands that are worked into such objects as liphao handbags, hats, baskets, fans, and bangles. Popular hand-woven fabrics include the cloth known as pha pa te, which is the plain cloth used to create batik fabric and to make garments such as sarong, table cloths and handkerchiefs.

Examples of handicrafts typical of the middle section are shadow play puppets made of cattle or goat hide and the cotton fabric called pha tho ko yo, literally translated cloth woven on Yo Island in the lake named Thale Sap Songkhla. Around the lake named Thale Noi, reed and bulrush in the wetlands are harvested and dried to manufacture handbags, hats and colourful mats.

In the upper section, the attractive phum riang silk fabric, especially the renowned gold and silver brocade, is woven by Muslim villagers. Pottery is practised using the old-fashioned technique of shaping vessels by hand. Nakhon nielloware, a regional specialty, is worked into such objects as rings, necklaces, bangles, bowls and trays.
Mineral deposits including metallic and non-metallic raw materials have been found throughout the eastern peninsular flank, both terrestrial and maritime. In history, the single most important metallic deposit was tin. In addition, there are fewer sites with metallic deposits of manganese, gold, antimony, barites, tungsten or wolfram, iron, chromite and lead. Likewise, there are non-metallic deposits of fluorite, graphite, lignite, kaolin, gypsum, silica sand, and semi-precious stones such as zircon. As of now, the economically most important resources are off-shore oil and natural gas in the seabed of the Gulf of Thailand.

**Emerging Economic Mainstay: Tourism**

There are strong indications that tourism has great potential and holds good promise to become an alternative pillar of the economic mainstay.

The sea off the coast of the lower peninsular section has very few islands. There is only one major island, Ko Losin, at great distance. The sea and reefs surrounding this rocky island form the habitat of more marine species than any other island in the Gulf of Thailand. Attractions include spectacular soft and hard corals and large pelagic fish. The peninsular coast is dotted with coves and beaches which are among the most pristine in Thailand. The long spit named Talo Kapo and its peninsula called Laem Tachi, also known as Laem Pho, are not only known for their beaches but also for their fishery harbours with colourful ko lae fishing boats. Islands off the coast of the eastern peninsular middle section are very few. Likewise, there are few beaches along the coast. The best known is Samila. A string of attractive beaches lines the coast of the upper section. More than one hundred islands are scattered in the upper Gulf of Thailand. Best known are the large islands of the Samui Archipelago, which comprises some 80 islands (in Thai called ko) and islets, of which seven are inhabited. They are Samui, Phangan, Tao, Ta Loi, Taen, Ma Ko and Ta Pao. Encompassed is the Ang Thong Archipelago National Park with 40 islands and islets. Lesser known are the many islands off the coast of the northernmost stretch of
the upper section coast, which are part of Chumphon Province.

Attractions in the interior worth visiting are varied. In the Lo Chut Local History Museum, Narathiwat Province, artefacts have been preserved which are 1,000 years old or older. Examples are bowls and pots, made from brass or earthenware, and a collection of *kris*, daggers with ridged serpentine blades, among many other items. From among the tribal population in the mountains, a group of Sakai has become sedentary in what is called the Sakai Tribal Village in Yala Province. The town of Phatthalung has been recognized as a centre of shadow-play (*nang talung*) performances. Phatthalung is also deemed the place from where the adoption of the *Manora* or *Nora*, of South Indian origin, spread throughout Southern Thailand and beyond.

![Samui Archipelago in the Gulf of Thailand](image)

*Samui Archipelago in the Gulf of Thailand*
On the Edge of Paradise
Andaman Sea Coast

Topographical Orientation

The mountainous backbone of the peninsula runs rather lopsided near the western coastline facing the Andaman Sea. Hence, it has settlements in coastal plains rather than the hinterland, which might best be described as “windows” to the world – in comparison to the “gateways” on the Gulf Coast. Moreover, in history navigating the Andaman Sea was difficult, at best, not to say outright dangerous, given the threats posed by rough seas during the monsoon, a myriad of reefs and seamounts, and pirates sheltering in the coves of the plethora of islands.

In this environment of ranges of high mountain crests, narrow coastal plains, rocky coastlines, archipelagos, scattered islands and islets as well as seamounts and reefs, the sea was the means of making a living, foremost, with its great variety of marine resources. Fisheries and trade got people from near and distant shores involved in exchanges such as seafaring merchants of the Coromandel Coast in present-day India and of realms on the island of Pa Tong Beach, Phuket Province
Sumatra. Ports such as Kantang in Trang Province were roadsteads and trading centres handling the flow of commodities between distant lands in the West and Ligor, the regional realm at the Gulf Coast, the area of present-day Nakhon Si Thammarat.

Such historical “land-bridges”, safe alternatives to the piracy prone Straits of Malacca, were operated by alternating between waterborne and land transportation. In this manner, commodities were shipped upstream on the Trang River, then carted across the watershed and loaded on boats going downstream on the Sin Pun and Tapi rivers. Farther north, from the Bight of Phang-nga goods were transshipped on the route known as Pak Phanom, first by boat on the Pak Lao River, then across the continental divide by either sliding the boats mounted on sledges, or carting goods which were again loaded onto boats going downstream via the Cha-un, Phum Duang and Tapi rivers of to the Bight of Surat Thani. Another such historical “land-bridge” linked the Andaman Sea port of Mergui, historically in the Siamese territory of Tenasserim, with Phiphli near present-day Petchaburi Town, on the coast of the Gulf, then the coastal harbour nearest Ayutthaya, the capital of Siam. Fisheries and trade were supplemented by the mining largely of tin deposits in hillsides as well as
in the seabed, the latter upon the introduction of dredging by the turn from the 19th to the 20th centuries, and the start of planting rubber trees, *Hevea brasiliensis*.

There still are blazing green mountain ranges with thick rainforests, cascading waterfalls, unspoilt mangrove forests, a translucent sea blessed with magnificent coral reefs, and abundant terrestrial as well as aquatic wildlife. To preserve this highly diverse natural environment, forest reserves, protected areas, national parks, a World Nature Heritage Park and a World Nature Conservation Site were demarcated. Owing to their physical settings as varied as archipelagos in the Andaman Sea, a coastline crusted with limestone karst mounts, flood-plain forests, hill-area wetlands, and rainforests straddling hills and mountain ranges, the western flank of the peninsula has the greatest concentration and highest density of nature reserves nationwide. With the hilly and mountainous hinterland widely uninhabited, or sparsely populated in only few locations, vast areas of virgin forests retain virtually pristine nature, both flora and fauna. Protected as national parks, some of them cover areas as large as those of contemporary, independent states. Together, these nature reserves represent the largest proportionate expanse of the surface
areas among the five major regions of Thailand, i.e. the Central, Eastern, Northern, Northeastern and Southern regions.

**Pristine Natural Environment in the Mainland Mountains**

The mountains, which run the length of the peninsula toward the south like a spine, and their slopes as well, are dotted with nature reserves, large and small. Khlong Phrao National Park covers much of the mountain range that forms the watershed between West and East, extending over an area of 668 sq km, equal to the area size of the Sultanate of Bahrain, and straddling across large parts of Ranong as well as neighbouring Chumphon provinces. A major attraction in the spectacular forests on its western slope is the Ngao Waterfall, cascading from a high mountain top. The great variety of wildlife includes a rare species of fresh water crab, *pu chao fa*, with a white elongated body and dark-violet claws and legs as well as eye sockets and mouth, which roams in rock clefts and beneath foliage alongside rivulets, which feed this waterfall as well as the equally attractive waterfalls called *Punyaban* and *Ton Phet*. The former is plunging from a high cliff, and the latter is cascading from the highest mountain peak in Ranong Province across eleven tiers of beautiful rock formations. Equally pristine is the environment of Khlong Nakha Forest Wildlife Reserve, with a one-thousand-metre long waterfall. A vast plateau covered with green grass in the rainy season, criss-crossed by trails open to visitors, is known by the names of *Phu Khao Ya* or *Khao Hua Lan*. This hilly grassland is encapsulated by dense forests which provide shelter to wildlife foraging in the open.

Northernmost in the mountain ranges of Phang-nga Province is the Si Phang-nga National Park, established in honour of H.M. the King’s 60th birthday anniversary. Covering 246 sq km, about the size of the Cayman Islands, its virgin forests are rich in flora and fauna as well as spectacular sights such as waterfalls. Forests have trees in abundance such as *yang*, a *Dipterocarpus* species, ironwood, sago palm and fan palm as well as a great variety of wild orchids. Wildlife species include tapir, goat-antelope, serow, banteng,
barking deer, tiger, Malay wreathed hornbill, helmeted hornbill, Asian fairy-blue bird, as well as soro brook carps and other rare fish.

Virgin forests in the rough mountains of Khao Lak – Lam Ru National Park, a vital headwater area of Phang-nga Province extending over 125 sq km, are the natural habitat of several *Dipterocarpus* tree species including *yang*, *Shorea*, ironwood and *Anisoptera* as well as Malacca teak and Indian rosewood chestnut. Wildlife that can be spotted, by guided trekking on long educational nature trails, includes tapir, tiger, goat-antelope, serow, langur, gibbon, Malay sambar, barking deer, Asian black bear and birds such as argus pheasant, Malayan wreathed hornbill, woodpeckers, bulbuls of the great variety of 22 local subspecies, Malay talking mynah, and drongos.

The mountainous part of Khao Lam Pi – Hat Thai Mueang National Park, in Phang-nga Province as well, covering a total area of 72 sq km, shows geomorphological formations aged between 140 and 60 million years. Its mountains are covered with virgin forests of *Dipterocarpus* species including the giant *yang* and ironwood trees as well as *Anisoptera*, mixed with ferns, rattan and bamboo. Wildlife therein includes the palm civet, Malay sambar, Burmese jungle fowl and Malay spotted dove.

A rare attraction alongside the educational nature trail in the Pa Ton Poriwat Wildlife Reserve of Phang-nga Province, with its great variety of tree species and the Ton Poriwan, also known as Song Phraek
Waterfall, is the blossoming, around October, of the *Rafflesia* [known in Thai as *bua phut*, or else as *krathon ruesi* meaning ‘hermit’s spittoon’]. This plant is an epiphyte botanically named *Rhinzanthes zippelii* (*Rafflesia*ceae) with the worldwide largest blossoms of about 80 centimetres in diameter, petals of brownish-reddish colour and letting off an offensive odour.

On the backbone of the island of Phuket, its mountains and hills, the remaining forest and wildlife are protected in the Khao Phra Thaeo Royal Wildlife and Forest Reserve. In its comparatively small area of 22 sq km, dense rainforest around the waterfalls of *Ton Sai* and *Bang Pae* harbours an arboretum with the rare *palm lang khao*, a fan palm, and the Gibbon Rehabilitation Centre, where gibbons freed from captivity are re-naturalized to be released to fend for themselves. Roaming freely are such wildlife species as wild pig, langur, Malayan sun bear, mouse-deer and birds including crimson sunbirds, white-fronted scops-owls and paradise flycatchers.
The mountain range of Phanom Bencha lies just off-centre of Krabi Province. Its southeastern, larger part with the highest peak at 1,397 metres forms the Khao Phanom Bencha National Park. The park area of 50 sq km, roughly the area size of Bermuda, is covered with dense rainforest, on both the northern and southern mountain sides. Natural attractions include waterfalls, caves and numerous species of wildlife. The rainforest is the habitat of the tapir, barking deer, serow, Asian black bear, fishing cat, clouded leopard, black panther, tiger, langur, dusky leaf monkey and gibbon. Birds of altogether 218 species can be watched, such as eagles, hornbills, woodpeckers, argus pheasant or great argus, and the extremely rare Guerney’s pitta.

At close distance is another site with hot springs, known as Sa Morakot, a cluster of three hot-water pools with clear, emerald waters of temperatures between 30° and 50° Celsius. This spot is surrounded by trees of the Khao Pra – Bang Khram Forest Wildlife Reserve, a non-hunting zone. It was established to protect one of the few remaining lowland forests in Thailand. A nature educational trail leads over a distance of 2.3 kilometres through the low-lying plain covered with virgin forest known as na choliff, the ‘Choliff Field’, named after Tina Choliff, an Englishwoman, who pioneered local forest conservation. As for the wildlife, signboards highlight especially the more than 300 avian species. Among them are Gurney’s pitta, thick-billed pigeon, a great variety of Asian barbets, Asian fairy-bluebird, bulbuls and various spiderhunters.

In the foothills of mountains within Krabi Province lies a small patch of the large Than Bok Khorani National Park, the former botanical garden for which the park was named, with nine caves. Emerald waters flow out of a narrow cave in a tall cliff and into a large lotus pool, which overflows steadily into a wide stream, itself dividing into many smaller streams in several stages; at each stage there is a pool and a small waterfall. Asok trees line the streams as well as pools. Numerous plants and trees characteristic of a virgin rainforest cover an area of 6.4 hectares, through which a nature educational trail winds over a length of one kilometre.
That part of the western flank of high mountains, which form the watershed and where the Trang River has its source, belongs to Trang Province. Its headwater area lies in the Khao Pu – Khao Ya National Park which straddles across the provinces of Phatthalung, Nakhon Si Thammarat and Trang. Most of its area of 694 sq km, larger than the Sultanate of Bahrain, consists of rugged terrain. Many of its very high mountain peaks are uniquely shaped like an anvil or dais, as expressed in the Thai description as *khao hin thaen*.

Thailand’s first educational facility of its kind is the Khao Chong Promotion Centre for Wildlife Conservation in Trang Province. The centre has a nature museum and an exposition hall equipped to practise conservation activities. Its two pilot, nature educational trails, known as the “Blue Trails”, wind over close to two and three kilometres, respectively, through one of the few remaining tropical rainforests, past the waterfalls of Ton Yai, Ton Noi and Kachong.

In the same mountain area is the habitat of large flocks of the duck species known as garganey and of the lesser whistling-duck or lesser tree-duck. These ducks are attracted by a large swamp surrounded by tall trees, located in the Khlong Lam Chan Waterfowl Park. Educational nature trails lead through this tranquil, no-hunting zone, dotted with pavilions for bird watching.

In the largely mountainous terrain
on the mainland of Satun Province, a unique ensemble of vegetation and wildlife has been preserved within the Thale Ban National Park. The national forest reserves of Ku Pang Pu To and Kaming combined with the wetland forest of Pu Yu form the park area of 196 sq km, thus exceeding the area size of the Principality of Liechtenstein. Derived from the original Malay name of ‘loed roe ban’, the name of ‘thale ban’ signifies a lake shrinking in size by filling up with sedimentation. The wetland inside the nature reserve extends over 101 sq km, interspersed with rugged mountains and covered with dense forests and thickets. This natural environment is habitat of wildlife such as goat-antelope, elephant, tapir, wild pig, dusky leaf monkey, white-handed gibbon, langur, tapir, serow, Malay sun bear and dhole or Malay wild dog as well as of a great variety of reptiles, amphibians and fish. Birds include the whiskered tree-swift, stripe-throated bulbul, chestnut-naped forktail, rufous piculet, woodpeckers, and flamebacks. Among the waterfalls [nam tok], two stand out. Ya Roy has nine tiers, with a pool at every level that is fit for swimming. Similar is the large Ton Pliu with several tiers. Lot Pu Yu is a cave with stalactites and stalagmites through which a stream flows. It empties into a fen grown over with mangroves.

Embedded in this pristine setting of Satun Province, at the bottom of a vale surrounded by mountains covered with rainforest, is the marsh with the freshwater lake named Thale Ban. Its shore is lined by cajeput, also known as milkwood [samet], both thickets and tall trees, growing out of the water as well as on dry ground above the water-line. This forest is locally known as ton ba kong. Through it and around the lake a wooden jetty was built for wildlife watching. The lake measuring 20 hectares has a large variety of fishes and plenty of mussels of
various kinds. In the rainy season, the shore is occupied by masses of noisy frogs [khia kwak]. Avian species, especially waterfowl and birds in the surrounding shrubs and forests include pheasants, bat hawk, booted eagle, masked finfoot, dusky crag martin and black baza, as well as numerous hornbill subspecies. In the mountains to the North, there in the National Forest Reserve named Pha Khao Ma Mai Yok, is the Thara Sawan Waterfall Forest Park. Across this mountainside in Satun Province, rainfalls are fairly evenly distributed throughout the year, keeping alive a pristine virgin forest.

**COASTAL PLAINS WEDGED BETWEEN FOOTHILLS AND SHORELINE**

Looking south from the estuary of the Kra Buri River that marks the border with Myanmar, a long stretch of coastal plain forms the Laem Son National Park, which covers an area of 315 sq km, equalling the area size of the Republic of Malta, extending across parts of Ranong and Phang-nga provinces, and comprising islands [ko] in the Andaman Sea including Khang Khao and the Kam Archipelago. Its many beautiful attractions include the beaches of Laem Son, Bang Ben and Praphat, the point of departure for islands such as Khang Khao, Kam Tok and Kam Yai and the seamount known as Hin Khan Na, with corals in abundance. The park is habitat for birds, monkeys and crab-eating macaques.

The coastal plains of Phang-nga Province are dotted with a variety of sites and spots that are of specific significance. The site of an ancient settlement named Ban Thung Tuek, situated near the district town of Khura Buri, presumably shows the remnants of a town built by migrants from the Coromandel Coast in present-day India. Thung Samet, located in the midst of the coastal plain called Hat Thai Mueang, is a vast expanse exclusively of cajeput trees covering an area of 160 hectares.

At the Chulabhorn MARPARK Pa Tong Beach, Phuket Province
Conservatory Centre, information and data are gathered about the southern marine environment and its natural resources. Nearby, at the sea turtle breeding and rearing station of the Royal Thai Navy, named Bo Anuban Tao Kong Thap Ruea Phak 3, efforts are focused on ensuring the survival of such endangered species as the green sea-turtle and hawk-bill turtle.

Sirinat National Park, spread across an area of 90 sq km on the island of Phuket, was first established in 1981. It includes 13 kilometres of coves and straight shore stretches. Sea-turtles come ashore to lay their eggs between November and February. In parts, the coast is lined by casuarinas or pandanus trees, interspersed with boulders. Other parts are covered by mangroves, with a network of raised wooden walkways for self-guided viewing of the wetland plant and animal wildlife.

In Krabi Province, the Noppharat Thara Coast – Phi Phi Archipelago National Park, one of the most spectacular national parks, straddles across some terra firma, equalling about one sixth of its area, and largely across the sea, totalling 388 sq km. In the area behind Nang Bay, thick virgin forests in the mountain area of Khao Hang Nak, mangroves along the creek of Klong Haeng, and a peat forest with plenty of cajeput trees [samet] represent three distinct types of forest. Within the Park lies the cape named Laem Pho, where a large fresh-water swamp is separated from the shore by fossilized shells. Petrified they form giant slabs known as shelly limestone, about 40 centimetres thick and estimated to be 75 million years old. The swamp is the habitat of masses of vivipara freshwater snails, known in Thai as hoi khom.
The coastal hinterland, by far the largest part of Than Bok Khorani National Park, totalling an area of 121 sq km, encompasses dense virgin forests, peat woodlands and mangroves. The flora and fauna of mangroves are made accessible along a four-kilometre nature educational trail.

The Southern Botanical Garden, also called Thung Khai and located in Trang Province, encompasses a section called “vegetable kingdom”. Another, planted with medicinal herbs, is a botany library, as well as a research and training facility. There are several educational nature trails, among them one trail through a rare lowland virgin forest and one through a rare peat forest, each with a great variety of trees.

**VITAL ECOSYSTEMS ALONG THE SHORES**

Along the shore, few stretches covered by natural vegetation have been preserved. Of particular significance are woodlands. Among these, the mangrove swamps are the spawning, hatching and breeding grounds of marine life. To conserve this vital environment, nature reserves were established. In Ranong Province, these are the Ngao Mangrove Forest Research Station, where visitors are
Ko Phi Phi, Krabi Province

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welcome to observe the indigenous and rare plants as well as wildlife, and the Plant Kingdom Garden, located in the Khlong Lam Liang – La-un National Forest Reserve, with 15 species of mangroves.

The accessible shores, as they run in north-south direction within Phang-nga Province, are a succession of beaches alternating with mudflats covered by mangrove trees or rock-strewn strips. Laem Pa Ka Rang, a peninsula, has a mangrove forest as well as a sandy beach, with stone-shaped coral reefs at its shoreline and Malay sambar deer roaming the coastal forest. The long, sandy Hat Bang Sak is studded with smoothly shaped granite boulders and lined by casuarinas. Off Khao Lak Beach is a live coral reef suitable for snorkelling. Attractions of the sandy beaches located inside Khao Lam Pi – Hat Thai Mueang National Park are fish such as rays and sea mullets, small clusters of stone-shaped corals and, above all, sea turtles coming ashore to lay their eggs, from November to February, and the hatching of turtle spawn from March until April.

Magnificent rock formations along the shore form part, albeit a minor one, of the Phang-nga Bay National Park, which boasts the largest primary, evergreen remaining mangrove forest in Thailand. The pristine environment is the habitat of such animals as white-handed gibbon, crab-eating macaque, serow and dusky langur and, particularly, reptiles including the Bengal monitor, flying lizard or dragon, an agamid, banded sea snake, dog-faced water snake, shore pit vipers, Malayan pit vipers, two-banded or water monitor as well as amphibians. Among avian residents are the helmeted hornbill, edible-nest swiftlet, white-bellied sea eagle, osprey and Pacific reef egret.

Situated within the boundaries of Than Bok Khorani National Park in Krabi Province are the caves [tham] named Lot and Phi Hua To. The cave named Lot is accessible by boat on a navigable stream flowing through a tunnel at the bottom of the limestone cliff. The nearby cave of Phiu Hua, also called Hua Kalok or Hua To, has prehistoric rock paintings featuring people, animals and geometric designs. Its bottom is littered with shells. Similar are the rock paintings in the cave called Chao Le, which bears the name of a
long sandy stretch, Hat Nopharat Thara or Khlong Haeng, strewn with lots of small shells, and the cape of Phra Nang with its adjacent, miraculous cave known as Tham Phra Nang.

The major coastal nature reserve within the boundaries of Trang Province is the Hat Chao Mai National Park. Its smaller part is situated on terra firma over a length of 20 kilometres, with some islands at close distance alongside. There is the Marine Life Study Centre covering the Andaman Sea and specializing in research on sea-grass, the scientifically proven, vital resource of the coastal water habitat. In this area, the endangered dugong (also called manatee or sea-cow) can sometimes be spotted. Rare black-necked storks feed on molluscs and crustaceans. Other avian species include little herons, Pacific reef-egrets and white-bellied sea eagles. Also, there are sea otters, macaques, langurs, wild pigs, pangolins, monitor lizards and water monitors. On the shore, evergreen rainforest, limestone crag forest in steep and rugged cliffs, mangroves and beach forest provide a suitable wildlife habitat.
The Phetra Archipelago National Park, with its 22 islands and covering a total land area of 494 sq km, straddles across the marine territories of the provinces of Satun and Trang. On the mainland, Nun Bay, a spacious and tranquil cove, as well as Rawai Beach lined by casuarinas, are part of this nature reserve.

**Myriad of Islands, Islets, Seamounts, and Reefs**

Of the hundreds of islands, islets, seamounts and reefs in Thailand’s territorial waters of the Andaman Sea, many form part of protected marine zones. Located northernmost is the Surin Archipelago National Park with five major islands and some islets, totalling a land area of 33 sq km, which covers a marine area of 135 sq km and belongs to Phang-nga Province. Its islands have sandy, white beaches, splendid stone-shaped corals in shallow waters, plenty of colourful fishes, a wondrous and fascinating underwater scenery, and a great variety of fish including whale-sharks. It is home to sea nomads known as Chao Le, also called Moken, an ethnic group native to the Andaman Sea whose people are used to live in boats. They make their living from the sea, in the traditional ways of catching, netting and harvesting.

By major islands, islets, seamounts and reefs, there is diversity. The islands [ko] with small as well as large coves, Surin Tai and Klang, also called Pa Chum Ba, reputedly have sea turtles coming ashore in great numbers to lay their eggs, during November through February. Bon Bay on the island of Surin Tai holds promise to spot white-tip sharks, small sharks called chalam kop, rays such as manta rays, giant manta rays and spotted devil-rays. Three out of five islands are famous for their corals. Their shores have some of the best stone-shaped as well as branching or tree-shaped
corals in shallow as well as deep waters. Shoals of colourful and flamboyant fishes, sea anemones and giant sea fans are ubiquitous. Another island, Khai or To Rin La, has a long stretch of stone-shaped coral reefs in deep waters close to its shore, which is the habitat of rays, a great variety of pretty fish, and plenty of dragon prawns.

The interior of the island of Surin Nuea has a great variety of wildlife, including such rare animals as the mouse-deer or chevrotain and flying lemur as well as bird species rarely sighted elsewhere, including the Nicobar pigeon and pied imperial pigeon. The island of Surin Tai has become home to some groups of the once exclusively nomadic ethnic group of the Chao Le or Moken.

Islands and seamounts bare of any beaches include the island of Ri, also known as Stork Island with massive granite boulders, which attracts a variety of sea turtles, reef sharks and blue-ringed angelfish. Situated off the northeast of the island of Surin Nuea is the small island of Chi with dive sites that are deemed among the very best. Richelieu Rock, a seamount southeast of the island of Surin Tai, is a major dive site and among the best places to encounter whale-sharks, which reportedly would be spotted nearby on every other dive trip, most commonly during March through April. Dangerous zebra-fish, sea anemones and whale-sharks are likely encountered when diving at the arched seamount of Castle Rock.

Further to the south, also within the boundaries of Phang-nga Province, the Similan Archipelago National Park comprises, as its name derived from the Malay word *semibilan* for the numeral ‘9’
indicates, nine islands with a total land area of approximately 20 sq km, in a sea area of 128 sq km. They form an idyllic marine park of beautiful surface and underwater sceneries, suitable for hiking, snorkelling or diving in shallow or deep waters, to admire splendid corals and colourful as well as rarely sighted fish.

All islands are known for rugged granite boulders that reveal what the rock formations below the seawater surface are like. Seamounts, ridges, cliffs, rock reefs, clefts, bowls, ledges, caves, archways, vast slates and troughs and troughs are the habitat of corals, including soft, branching or tree-shaped, swaying corals, iridescent corals, and hard corals such as porites and table acroporas, i.e. corals shaped like a large ‘leaf’, ‘brain’, ‘flower’ or ‘mushroom’. Coupled with ‘gardens’ of gigantic, gorgonian sea fans, the underwater scenery teems with large sea turtles such as hawksbill and leatherback turtles, schooling goatfish, yellow snappers, blue-ring angelfish, Moorish idols clad in brilliant jackets of yellow and black, green chromis, antheus, iridescent wrasses, cartoon fish, black-and-white batfish, fusiliers, golden damselfish, moray eels and leopard moray eels, groupers, sleepers and gobies, unicorn surgeonfish, Asian snappers, yellowfins, reef sharks, rays, stingrays, dragon shrimps, spiny lobsters, mantis prawns, plume worms and large pelagic fish including leopard.
sharks, silver-tip sharks, white-tip sharks, giant tuna, giant rays, stingrays, mantas, whales, dolphins and whale-sharks.

In addition to the wonders of the sea, the Similan Islands are habitat of terrestrial and avian wildlife. There are two species of crabs known as *pu kai*, with an elongated red body, black claws, blue eye-sockets, which make noise like chicken, and Szechuan crabs. Mammals include the bush-tailed porcupine, common palm civet and flying lemur. Among the reptiles and amphibians are the banded kraits, reticulated pythons, white-lipped pit vipers, common pit vipers, Bengal monitor lizards, common water monitor lizards and ornate froglets. Of some 32 species of birds, resident examples are the Brahmin kite and white-breasted waterhen, and migratory ones include the pintail snipe, grey wagtail, cattle egret, watercock, roseate tern, rock pigeon, imperial pied-pigeon and Nicobar pigeon. Rocky islands without beaches proper are Pa Yan, the minor Miang islands, Pa Yu, Bon or Hua Kalok and Ba Ngu. Among rocks and boulders below the waterline unfolds a splendid ensemble of corals and flamboyant sea-life. In strong currents hard, stone-shaped and soft, antler or tree-shaped corals thrive, along with sea fans and sea anemones. Shoals of beautiful fish, big reef fish, sea-turtles and large pelagic fish including the world’s largest, the whale-shark, are the floating attractions. Numerous are dive sites reaching down to depths of about 40 metres.

Seamounts and reefs surround the islands. Famous for their wonderful habitat are flat, sandy plateaus of submerged massifs as well as undersea ridges, slates, rocks and boulders. Some are topographically identified as Beacon Point, Hin Phae, Hin Pu Sa with its “Elephant Pinnacles”,

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Kong Hin Faentasi, Christmas Point, Bird Rock, Turtle Rock and Stonehenge as well as reefs named ‘Shark Fin’, ‘Turtle Gully’, ‘Morning Edge’, ‘Coral Gardens’, ‘Campbell Bay’, ‘Dirk’s Decision’, ‘The Mooring’, ‘Snapper Alley’, ‘Deep Six’ and ‘Batfish Bend’. In this marine environment, the diversity of corals, sea fans, sea anemones, fish and various amphibians is particularly great and spectacular. The archipelagos of Surin and Similan are world-renowned for their pristine natural environments above the sea and in their underwater surroundings. Efforts are underway to have these archipelagos and adjacent islands recognized as a World Nature Conservation Site.

Equally worthy of protection and conservation are the adjacent islands of Ta Chai and Phra Thong, situated within the territory of Phang-nga Province as well. While Ta Chai has magnificent corals at depths of 18 to 35 metres, where rays and whale-sharks gather, Phra Thong has wide coves with sandy beaches and wildlife in its interior such as Malay sambar deer and wild pig, and among its many bird species the Malay wreathed hornbill and the lesser adjutant.

Small islands to the south of Phuket are exposed to strong current and surf. They are known, first and foremost, for their beautiful underwater scenery. Hard, stone-shaped coral reefs surround the islands of Pu, Kaeo Noi and Kaeo Yai, Racha Noi and Racha Yai, Mai Thon, He and Khai Nok, in both shallow and deep waters. Young stone-shaped corals are a particular attraction at a site off Racha Yai. Pristine coral gardens in shallow waters and the habitat for larger pelagic fish among deeply submerged boulders distinguish Racha Noi. Scenic bays with sandy beaches adorn the shores of Racha Yai, Mai Thon, He and Khai Nok.

Officially decreed “Marine Sanctuaries” include the islet named Ko Dok Mai, the famous dive site called “Shark Point” and the submerged pinnacle forming a shallow reef called “Anemone Reef”. Ko Dok Mai is a seamount of steep limestone cliffs with caves, which are the preferred habitat of larger pelagic fish. “Shark Point” teems with abundant marine life that includes leopard sharks and moray eels. “Anemone
Reef” is so named for the tapestry that covers the shallow reef and offers the habitat preferred by the likes of moray eel and zebra-fish.

Over 40 limestone islands and islets combined form the largest part of the Phang-nga Bay National Park, which as a whole covers an area of 400 sq km. Among these islands, some may represent the scope of attractions. Pan Yi is a limestone cliff with a Muslim fishing settlement built on stilts along the shore. Phanak has a cave and a pool at the bottom of a multi-tiered waterfall. Tha Lu is known for its water-filled cave accessible by boat. Khao Phing Kan is a gigantic cliff cloven in two, the halves leaning against each other. Khao Ta Pu or ‘James Bond Island’ figures as a spectacularly tall and broad peak with a narrow base. Hong, with low and high peaks, imparts on entering its cave the sensation of being in a large, gilded hall. Yao Noi with the beaches of Pa Sai and Tha Khao as well as Yao Yai with beaches in the bays of Tikut, Khlong Son, Lan, Sai, Loparaet and at the cape of Nok Ok, most of them with white, clean sand, some bordered by rocks, some with pebbly stretches, are all suitable for swimming and not too far from
stone-shaped coral reefs. Ao Hin Kong alone is not suitable for water sports, yet attractive owing to its native Muslim fishing population, with opportunities to observe fishing or join crews. Khai Nok and Khai Nai boast white sandy beaches, clear sea water, beautiful stone-shaped coral reefs and colourful fishes. Bele has a large tidal lagoon, white-sand beaches, easily accessible caves and coral reefs all around. The marine area of Krabi Province is virtually subdivided among three national parks, thus encompassing by far most of its islands. They are the Hat Noppharat Thara – Mu Ko Phi Phi National Park, the Than Bok Khorani National Park and the Mu Ko Lanta National Park.

Spread across a marine area of 321 sq km, which forms by far the larger part of the Hat Noppharat Thara – Mu Ko Phi Phi National Park, are two archipelagos and numerous other islands and islets. The Po Da Archipelago with the islands of Po Da, Thap, Mo, Hua Khwan and Kai, is known for white sandy beaches, clear sea water and attractive stone-shaped coral reefs, and the island of Rang Nok for its underwater cave. Farther away
from the coast lies the Phi Phi Archipelago. Sandy beaches and clear sea water are matched by the amazing underwater domain with jutting cliffs, stone-shaped coral reefs, sea anemones and a great variety of colourful fishes. Its islands include Phi Phi Le, Phi Phi Don, Yung, Mai Phai, Bida Nok and Bida Nai. Closer to the Krabi mainland coast lie several islands and islets that belong to the Than Bok Khorani National Park. Islands of particular interest include Ka Rot which is popular for canoeing to visit caves; Dueng with a sandy beach, a spacious cave and a stone-shaped coral reef; and the Hong or Lao Pi Le Archipelago. It comprises several limestone islands such as Hong or Lao Pi Le, Lao or Chaka, Lao Riam, Pak Ka and Lao La Ding. Among these, Hong is the largest with mostly rocky terrain, a nature educational trail, clear sea water and stone-shaped coral reefs in shallow as well as deep waters.

The third national park in the marine environment, Mu Ko Lanta National Park, is entirely insular. Its area of 152 square kilometres encompasses 52 islands. The major islands are Lanta Yai, Lanta Noi, Ta La Beng, Klay Khiang, Pu or Klang, Nok Khuam, Si Bo Ya together with Cham, Bu Bu, Po, Kam Yai, Kam Noi, Son, Hai, Bok and the Ha Archipelago as well as the far-flung
island of Ngai and the even farther Rok Archipelago. The Ha Archipelago has a fabulous concentration of coral reefs. Its islands of Ha, Bida, Hin Mueang and Hin Daeng have been described as “coral-encrusted”. The abundance of hard and soft corals provides the habitat for a highly diverse sea-life and, hence, attracts large pelagic fishes such as shark, tuna, manta ray and whale-shark.

Encircled by corals as well, some of them hardly submerged, lots of them grown into stone-shape and forming a ring of islets, is the island of Ngai. It has sandy beaches at the foot of mountains in the interior which are covered by dense forest. Coral reefs surround the islands of the Rok Archipelago, Rok Nai and Rok Nok. Although part of Ko Lanta District, Krabi Province, the island of Ngai is best accessible from the coast of Trang Province and also serves as the jumping-off point to Rok Nai and Rok Nok.

Most islands within the boundaries of Trang Province belong to the marine areas of either one of the two national parks, Hat Chao Mai National Park or Phetra National Marine Park. Together, they number some 40 islands. In the Hat Chao Mai National Park the largest island by far is Libong with an area of 40 square kilometres. Together with nearby islets, it forms the Libon Archipelago, part of which was decreed a non-hunting area. Along the shore, sea grass abounds. It is the preferred fodder of the rare and endangered dugong or manatee, called phayun in Thai. It is a sanctuary as well for other endangered sea-life such as green turtles and dolphins. Avian species include collared kingfisher, black-necked stork, white-breasted waterhen, little heron, whiskered tern, whimbrel, Kentish plover, crab plover, redshank and Pacific reef-egret.

The Phetra Archipelago National Park with its 22 islands and covering a land area of 494 sq km in total, straddles across the marine territories of the provinces of Trang and Satun. Among its islands situated in the waters of Trang Province are Phetra, Lanti, Lao Liang Nuea, Lao Liang Tai, Daeng, Ta Bai, Ta Lui Yai, Ta Lui Noi and Perama. The island of Phetra, shaped like a junk, and the other islands of the archipelago have rugged terrain with high mountains and deep vales under forest cover,
which are habitat to varied wildlife. The islands are surrounded by a great variety of stone-shaped coral reefs.

The islands belonging to the Phetra Archipelago National Marine Park and situated in the waters of Satun Province have rugged terrain with high mountains and deep vales covered with forests, which are habitat to varied wildlife. They are surrounded by a great variety of stone-shaped coral reefs. The larger islands include Li Di Yai, Li Di Lek, Bu Lon Don, Bu Lon Mai Phai, Bu Lon Le, Khao Yai, A Yam, Rang Nok, Bu La, La Ma, Tong Ku, Kluai, Hin Khao and La Lo Baen Tae.

The first national marine conservation area of Thailand, Taru Tao National Park, established in 1974, is also the largest of its kind, with a combined sea and land area of 1,490 sq km, encompassing altogether 51 large and small islands, which are part of Satun Province. It was recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 1982, and also as one of the ASEAN Heritage Parks and Reserves. The islands belong to one of four archipelagos, namely, the Taru Tao, Klang or Khai, Adang-Rawi, and Tong or Bu Tong archipelagos. The main island of the Taru Tao Archipelago is the one which lends it the name, Taru Tao, derived from the Malay name of Ta Lo Tarau, signifying “many bays”. In the Taru Tao Archipelago, as well as of the Taru Tao National Park, the island of Taru Tao is the largest, with an
area of 152 sq km. Its mostly mountainous terrain is largely covered with virgin forest, which is accessible on an educational nature trail. Endowed with streams, waterfalls and caves, the interior is the habitat of such wildlife as dusky langur, mouse-deer or chevrotain, wild pig, fishing cat and crab-eating macaque. The cave known as Tham Chorakhe was variously described as between 300 and 1,000 metres long. The coast has bays, coves and beaches where hawksbill, leatherback, Pacific ridley, and green sea-turtles lay their eggs. The bays of Ta Lo Wao and Ta Lo Adang are the sites of former prisoner training and manufacturing camps.

The other three archipelagos of the Taru Tao National Park are parts of its subunit named Laem Son Protection Section of the National Park. The Khai or Klang Archipelago comprises rocky islands, islets and seamounts which are surrounded by
many stone-shaped coral reefs. Among the small islands are Ta Nga, Khai, Klang, Bi Sa Si or Lek, Bong Kang, Ta Rang, Hin Ta Kon and Kra. The Adang-Rawi Archipelago includes large and small islands such as Adang, Rawi, Li Pe, Hin Ngam, Yang and Cha Bang. The name of the island of Adang, the largest with an area of 30 sq km, is derived from the Malay word ‘adang’ which translates as ‘prawn’, given the abundance of prawns in its coastal waters. It is a densely forested island. Its white-sandy beaches face off-shore coral reefs with many live species of coral. On the west coast is the village of Talo Puya, whose inhabitants are the Chao Le or Moken, a seafaring ethnic group native to the Andaman Sea. Their rallying point on festive occasions is the small island of Si Pe or Li Pe, or else Ni Pis, surrounded by stone-shaped coral reefs. The other large island is Rawi, with an area of 29 sq km. Its sandy beaches and clear seawater offer excellent snorkelling spots. Stone-shaped as well as branching coral reefs with many live species of coral are ideally suited for diving. The other, small islands are equally, if not more attractive. Hin Ngam has a beach that is covered with dark-coloured, shiny pebbles. Yang or Ka Ta, or else Pa Na Ka has
splendid stone-shaped coral reefs such as those called *Khao Kwang Pakarang Phak Kat*, in English antler-shaped corals resembling lettuce’, and *Pakarang Samong*, in English ‘stone-shaped corals resembling brains’. The island of Cha Bang with its surrounding rocks has young, stone-shaped coral reefs, with many live species of coral, sea anemones and shoals of colourful fishes. The Tong or Bu Tong Archipelago is a cluttering of six small islands with stone-shaped coral reefs at shallow shore sites as well as in deep waters. These islands are Tong or Bu Tong, Hin Chon, Lok Kuai, Bu Lo, Sa Kai and Sa Rang or Sawang.

Given all these fabulous natural facets, it does not come as a surprise that these land and marine areas of Thailand’s peninsula facing the Andaman Sea have impressed ever more visitors as a virtual edge of paradise, thus adding tourism to the economic mainstay of the Andaman Sea Coast and its islands.
Tsunami Impact

The earthquake of 26 December 2004, which triggered the giant waves known as tsunami, the Japanese word for “harbour wave”, that forged into the Andaman Sea and devastated some of Thailand’s coastal areas and islands with diabolic force, alerted the world community to how precarious life on the edge of paradise could be. Under the destructive impact of the tsunami, far too many local people and visitors perished or went missing. Many more traumatized survivors had been injured, were bereaved, suffered loss of or damage to their property, or were deprived of their source of livelihood. That terrible disaster has triggered both reactive and pro-active interventions, in virtually all spheres of the natural and physical environment.

Given the emphasis of this feature on the natural environment of the coast, islands and waters of the Andaman Sea, the focus is on the impact which the tsunami had on select aspects of the littoral and marine ecosystems.

As a reaction to the terrible tsunami, the need for information, felt not solely by policymakers but particularly by lay-persons, covers five facets that are of vital significance. The salient questions are [1] in how far the occurrence of giant waves is germane to the ecosystem of the Andaman Sea, [2] how public alertness could be enhanced in parallel with a state-of-the-art early warning system, [3] how some parts of the natural environment were adversely affected and rehabilitated while others remained unscathed, [4] how nature restores, recreates, and creates ecosystem components, and [5] what proactive ecological strategies as well as measures are identified so as to safeguard against any future loss of life.

- In how far is the occurrence of giant waves germane to the ecosystem of the Andaman Sea?

First and most of all, by far most local residents and visitors along the coast and on the islands of the Andaman Sea had no knowledge of any occurrence of such giant waves. To date, 80 percent of all tsunamis occurred in the Pacific Ocean, and few only in the Indian Ocean, of which the Andaman Sea is part.
the Indian Ocean, the recurrence of 10-metre waves was extrapolated at an interval of about 1,000 years.¹ People were, hence, caught unaware of the monstrous impact of a tsunami, triggered by one of the strongest earthquakes on record at the bottom of the ocean. The seismic slip of 26 December 2004 caused a rupture running the length of 1,200 km which sparked the waves.²

How could public alertness be enhanced in parallel with the introduction and operation of a state-of-the-art early-warning system?

Five lessons imparted by and learnt from nature proved to ensure survival. The following experiences render proof of the feasibility, not to say necessity, to recognize the need for environmental conservation, as a matter of principle, and to heed nature’s signals, which would be flashed in the process of any such rare force gathering virulence, thus allowing for time to escape.

A herd of some 100 heads of buffalo grazing on the Muang Kluang Peninsula in Kapoe District of Ranong Province, which was the coastal strip hit most violently by the tsunami, stampeded in panic towards the inland hills, well before the giant waves reached the shore. Villagers ran after their livestock for fear of losing it. As a result, the livestock survived, and nobody perished under the onslaught.

In like manner, tamed elephants trained to carry tourists around for sight-seeing began to trumpet, “cry” and wail, when they sensed the giant waves coming, well before they were visible. Escaping into the hills with their mahouts and charges of tourists riding on elephant backs, followed by alerted people, human and animal lives were saved.

When the ocean receded before the giant waves surged and hit, most people witnessing its perplexing disappearance did not understand the ominous warning sign. Many even wandered out onto the unexpected mud flats in pursuit of the receding sea, to marvel at this extraordinary

¹ Benfield Hazard Research Centre, London.
² The seafloor bulge unleashed a wave that surged through the Indian Ocean. Initially, the energy of such a wave is distributed throughout the water column, and surface perturbation is small. Only when the water grows shallow, near the coast, does the wave emerge on the surface as a tsunami.
phenomenon.

The Moken, a seafaring ethnic group native to the eastern longitudes of the Andaman Sea, have preserved in their oral tradition a body of life-saving indigenous knowledge that is based on experience and observations gathered since time immemorial. It enabled these “sea-wise” people to become alerted to the imminent danger, take necessary precautions, and survive, albeit losing their immovable properties. A hitherto neglected dimension of the detrimental impact of encroachment on protected coastal areas became obvious. By far the worst damage to coral reefs and sea fans at affected sites was caused by debris and detritus of modern civilization.

Objects of all sorts and sizes had been swept off the largely illicitly built-up shorelines on the mainland and island coasts.

How were some adversely affected parts of the natural environment rehabilitated, and which others remained unscathed?

Nine of the 17 marine national parks remained unaffected by the tsunami, with a clustering of unscathed nature reserves alongside and in the territorial waters of the provinces of Trang and Satun. In Satun Province, many beaches and islands were not affected, with their coral reefs in shallow waters undamaged and deep-water coral reefs untouched. Three natural ecosystems are singled out here for closer inspection, including [1] the fragile terrestrial ecosystem, [2] the mangrove forests, and [3] the coral reefs. On high ground, priority was given to recovering those freshwater sources which had been swamped by giant waves and contaminated with

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3 A native ethnic group of originally nomadic people, known for their fishing, diving, and navigating expertise and skills. They call themselves Iraklahoi, and are also known as Chao Le or Chao Nam in Thai, Orang Laut in Malay, and “Sea Nomads” or “Sea Gypies”.
saline water, removing salty mud from top soils, rejuvenating vegetation as the vital source of fodder for wildlife, and rehabilitating agricultural lands.

Post-disaster assessments made evident that shores originally covered with mangrove forests yet lost to encroachment, equalling 30 percent, were far worse ravaged than shores with existing, albeit tsunami-damaged mangrove forests. While restoring vast tracts of mangroves is feasible by assisting nature to heal the wounds, the reclaiming of encroached mangrove forests for rehabilitation is an obvious necessity yet might prove difficult.

Soon after the giant waves had ravaged certain sections of mainland and island coasts, surveys rendered evidence that the waves had an impact largely on coral reefs in shallow waters at some sites along the shorelines, while the effects on deep-water ecosystems were much smaller. While many areas were unscathed, in others minor fractions of between five and 20 percent of the coral reefs sustained damage. This explains why marine life in the areas surveyed was found to be largely intact.4

While some broken coral parts were seemingly doomed to perish under thick layers of sand, the summer monsoon would wash out the sand. Young and new coral species would cling to the reef remains and grow. Those corals only turned-over were beginning to recover. This was ensured by sealing off certain sites for wholesome regeneration. Although overall minor proportions of corals were destroyed, it was deemed mandatory to remedy the

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4 The coral bleaching reported by the Phuket Marine Biological Centre (PMBC) in June, 2005 was not caused by the tsunami. As explained by the PMBC, coral bleaching would occur in periods of extraordinarily calm sea, very clear water and sky, exposure to solar irradiance, localized rise in water temperature, and high penetration of UV radiation. The spectacular colour of healthy coral comes from microscopic single-celled algae called *zooxanthellae* that live within the coral tissue and manufacture food for the coral. Coral and algae work together to generate limestone skeletons, which accumulate to form a framework on which countless plants and animals settle, creating one of the most complex, species-rich and productive ecosystems. When the coral is stressed, this symbiotic relationships breaks down and the coral expels the *zooxanthellae*. The coral then loses its colour and becomes bone-white. Coral bleaching occurred worldwide, every three to four years. The year 1998 was a disastrous one for the Pacific and Indian oceans, the Mediterranean, Red, and Caribbean seas, and the Gulf of Mexico.
loss of habitat for marine life and, hence, restore the source of livelihood of fishing communities. Sea fans disconnected by the impact of giant waves were propped up by fastening them onto the sea bed.

- How does nature restore, recreate, and create ecosystem components?

Earth’s surface is made up of big crustal slabs that float on a sea of melted rock. Over ages, this churning sea moves the plates. The type of geological process that caused the earthquake and the tsunami is an essential characteristic of the Earth. Waves are the inevitable side effects of the constant recycling of the planetary crust, which produces a lush, habitable planet. The diabolic tsunami may prove to be an ecological boon for coastal areas, over the coming decades. Huge waves can distribute rich sediments from river systems across coastal plains, making the soil richer. Its fertility is conducive to the growing of coffee trees, sugar cane, hevea ('rubber') trees, coconut palms, oil palms, tobacco plants, pepper vine, tea trees and cocoa trees.

- What proactive ecological strategies as well as measures ought to be taken so as to safeguard particularly against any future loss of life?

Ecological impact assessments conducted by national as well as international organizations were focussed on vital aspects of environmental conservation. For example, a Thai – Swedish team of experts identified high-risk coastal areas that are exposed to erosion as well as destruction by tidal waves and require environmental restoration mainly through renaturation by planting mangroves.

Mangrove forests serve not only as an important natural protective barrier against waves and storms, but are the breeding ground of marine life. They are vital for the conservation of marine resources and, therefore, an ecological necessity with a view to realizing the long-term Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) under the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Equally important is the ecological restoration of beaches. By nature, two almost parallel lines of sand dunes act as physical barriers to protect the shore
ecosystem. Where such sand dunes were flattened or used as building ground, they need to be restored. Moreover, as jointly appraised by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, UNDP and World Bank, the future development of sustainable eco-tourism and the recovery as well as diversification of the livelihood of fishing communities will heavily rely on the recovery and regeneration of the coral reefs.

Resilience on the part of local people and restoration as well as conservation of the environment should be reconciled with the exigencies of human habitat and the highly desirable, ecologically salutary tourism. Equipped with a state-of-the-art early warning system and alertness, living and working as well as holidaying or vacationing become feasible and enjoyable on this safeguarded edge of paradise.
Prominent among the cultural traits of Thai society is sanuk, an essential ingredient of the Thai way of life. It is sanuk that puts a smile onto Thai people's face, every so often.

Soon after their arrival in Thailand, foreign visitors would likely encounter situations in which people spontaneously interact in a manner that resembles a sudden and joyful interlude escalating into a quick, light-hearted exchange of words, followed by chuckling and, then, carrying on with ones' affairs contentedly. First-time observers would likely form the impression that great fun was had. Upon inquiring what such sudden surge of exhilaration was all about, the answer will likely be brief — and yet pointing to a most complex facet of Thai everyday life: sanuk.

In essence, sanuk is interactive. To be precise, sanuk is shared, like when talking, listening, watching, giving and deriving pleasure, applauding. It is this quality which makes it obvious to observers and witnesses.

It has commonly been translated as something amusing, interesting like a play or fair, something jolly, cheery and agreeable. Likening sanuk summarily to fun is misleading. There is a resemblance only in as far as looking good-naturedly at the funny side of something goes. To make fun of something or someone in a derisive manner is not in the spirit of sanuk.

Sanuk ranges from the momentous flashing of the bright side to the institutionalized entertainment of yore, the like, a burlesque theatrical performance that can be compared to the commedia dell'arte.

The focus of sanuk is on a situation that may cause tension, or else may lend itself to exposing a certain comic touch.

What makes sanuk evolve? What brings sanuk to life? It takes one or few persons to kick it off, to get the ball rolling. The jolly talker is a popular fellow, woman as well as man. As sanuk is deeply ingrained in Thai culture and society, it is passed on through child socialization, from generation to generation. As a result,
there is an abundance of talented people who have a sharp sense for the comic facet of a situation, who have a talent for quickness of repartee, who have the gift of playing on words, of making impromptu puns, and of hitting the punch line.

Essentials of *sanuk* include conditions or circumstances that are conducive to diverting attention from the dry and the serious. Those in a group who have a quick grasp would literally sense the right moment and seize on the opportunity to broach a boisterous quip.

Effects of *sanuk* are salutary and constructive. They include amusement, diversion, entertainment – all enjoyed to take one’s mind off things cumbersome or stressful. Animated, good-natured and witty joking and bantering, in short, *sanuk*, remains a vital element of quality of life in Thai society.

Manifestations of *sanuk* have undergone major changes in the sense that its spectrum has been widened. While *sanuk* still originates where people happen to meet by chance or gather explicitly for this purpose, modern information and communication technologies have enlarged the field. On one side, mass media reach vast audiences, from pre-school children enjoying cartoons to adults watching soap operas. On the other side, SMS using WAP facilitate the exchanges of personalized extempore slapping sticks.

To conclude, *sanuk* is here to stay.
The National Identity Board

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