

2010

Ayutthaya – Khlong Takhian Kayaking Track



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AYUTTHAYA HISTORICAL RESEARCH [AHR]
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AYUTTHAYA – KHLONG TAKHIAN KAYAKING TRACK (Le Canal du Grand Cochon)

This kayak tour highlights old foreign settlements and important historical sites south of Ayutthaya's main city island. This culturally diverse area includes a potpourri of churches, mosques, monasteries, and other historical sites. This kayak route is ideal for those wanting to get off-the-beaten track for some natural scenery or to learn about local Thai life along the city's water ways. This total length of this route is slightly over 10 kilometers.

This southern area is shaped by the borders of Khlong Takhian and the Chao Phraya River, which is split into two parts by Khlong Khu Cham. The western section was inhabited by "Vietnamese" refugees – mostly Christian communities of Tonkinese, Annamese and Cochinese. This is also where the French made their quarters in the 17th century. The French referred to Khlong Takhian as "Canal du Grand Cochon", and they established a church at its northern mouth. The French settlement was dominated by priests and thus focused more on religion than trade. Mon refugees settled in the area on the opposite side of the canal.

The eastern section was populated by the Chinese (around Bang Kaja) and Portuguese trading communities, which included three neighborhoods with churches along the west bank of the Chao Phraya. In addition, the eastern section included Buddhist temples pre-dating the foundation of the Ayutthaya Kingdom, which have yielded relics dating to the late-Dvaravati period.

Muslims had foreign settlements throughout the area. The southern part was occupied by the Malay and Patani Muslims, who also had neighborhoods and markets in the north along the Chao Phraya River. Opposite Khlong Takhian, on its south bank, was the location of the Makassarese refugees before their village was destroyed after an uprising against the throne. Cham Muslims from Cambodia and Vietnam lived beside Khlong Khu Cham (known as "Le Canal du Petit Cochon" by the French). In addition, Muslims from Persia and India settled in this area as well. These Muslims communities were sometimes collectively labeled as Moors by early Westerners.

In addition, this kayak loop will also explore old foreign settlements situated on the eastern banks of the Chao Phraya River. This geographic zone was used by foreign traders and settlers – including the Chinese, Dutch, British, and Japanese.

The tour will take 3-4 hours according to your level of physical fitness, the conditions of the water current, and your personal kayaking experience. Travel time will expand if you stop to visit every highlight listed on this tour itinerary. Nevertheless, we have listed a few extra sites for the sake of smoother navigation and to alert kayakers to possible locations for obtaining water and other supplies. Individual kayakers can choose where to stop according to their own tastes and time constraints.

If you are interested in viewing photographs of the temples in advance or would like additional historic information about these ruins, visit our website at www.ayutthaya-history.com.

AYUTTHAYA – KHLONG TAKHIAN KAYAKING TRACK (Le Canal du Grand Cochon)

Tips and Warnings

There are basically two main philosophies when it comes to kayaking, and your personal standpoint is vital for planning in advance. One philosophy is to kayak for the sake of sports and fitness. In this case, you may emphasize speed and getting a physical workout. This style of kayaking may require stopping at fewer historic sites, packing less weight, paddling against the current, and stocking up on extra supplies of water and electrolyte beverages.

The second train of thought stresses recreational ecotourism. You can easily spend a relaxing 6-7 hours on these routes while exploring local flora and fauna, chatting with locals, studying each and every historic site, and waiting for the best lightening for photographs. If this is your style of kayaking, you will need to protect your extra equipment with waterproof bags that can float, wear extra sunscreen, and maybe even pack an ice chest with plenty of cold drinks. Try to understand your motive for kayaking and pack accordingly.

Water Currents - The most important variable for making kayaking plans in Ayutthaya is water current. Rainy season can result in flooding and/or rapidly moving water. For this reason, it is not always advisable to kayak from mid-September to mid-November (yet, this same seasonal flooding may also open up new routes when water flows into formerly dry canals, so don't rule it out). The confluence of the Chao Phraya and Pa Sak rivers, in front of Wat Phanan Choeng, has been historically notorious for whirlpools during the rainy season. Use caution when the current is fast and consider wearing life jackets.

Tidal Action - Tidal action affects Ayutthaya's waterways even though the city is located far away from the Gulf of Thailand. This tidal action causes the rivers to shift directions at unpredictable times of the day. Therefore, it may be useful to adjust your itinerary to account for these shifting currents and to perhaps do some of the kayaking routes in reverse if necessary.

Clothing - It is advisable to wear a good hat and loose-fitting clothing that dries quickly. Long pants may be useful and appropriate if you plan on visiting Buddhist temples on route. Also, the refracted sunlight from the water makes sunburn commonplace, so put on plenty of sunscreen.

Canals - The small canals contribute to the most exciting kayaking adventures in Ayutthaya. The water current moves much slower in the canals, which makes them much less strenuous than rivers for paddling. However, the greatest issue is water hyacinth. These prolific plants often clog up the waterways, making it impossible to proceed any further. This blockage can take place suddenly at any time of the year, and water hyacinths are a reoccurring problem on virtually every canal in the city. Likewise, some of the city's water gates may close without notice, or dams upstream may release water, which complicates canal exploration at times. Therefore, it is always useful to have a backup plan for alternative kayaking routes. In addition, when stepping onto dry land in remote areas, it is always advisable to keep your eyes open for dogs, snakes, and other wild animals.

Traffic - Kayaking in Ayutthaya is much safer than riding a bicycle. Kayaking cuts down on the more dangerous and chaotic motor vehicles. Nevertheless, when paddling on the city's

AYUTTHAYA – KHLONG TAKHIAN KAYAKING TRACK (Le Canal du Grand Cochon)

three rivers - Chao Phraya, Lopburi, and Pa Sak - you still need to exercise caution. Unfortunately, jet skiing has become a growing trend in Ayutthaya, and these motor vehicles drive fast and reckless. It is common for them to slash local fisherman nets as they race by and for them to send large waves splashing against other boats. Make sure to brace yourself and tie your equipment down well. On the city's rivers, you should also watch out for the large barges that slowly drift by. It is usually a good idea to stay close to the river bank for safety.

Night Kayaking - Night kayaking can be very beautiful as many of the historic sites are lit up at night and the large flying fox bats often decorate the sky. However, please keep in mind that it is difficult for larger boats to see kayaks in the evening, so stay close to the river banks. Long-tail boats are less common at night, but they can still catch you by surprise. Night visibility is much better close to the full moon. Also, in night as well as day, locals commonly go fishing near the river bank. Be careful not to tangle with their fishing lines while kayaking.

Theft - The theft of kayaks and boats is nearly unheard of in Ayutthaya, but it is still a good idea to keep backpacks, cameras, and other valuables with you when visiting the sites on route. Money should be placed in an air-tight, floatable, water-proof container.

Rentals and Agencies - Unfortunately, although Ayutthaya once thrived as maritime city, many of its canals were since buried to make roads for motor vehicles. As a result, the local travel agencies have mostly focused on sightseeing via tuk-tuk or minivan. Water-based tourism is exclusive to long-tail boats and dinner boats. Nevertheless, there has been recent interest in kayaking, and a growing number of expatriates have purchased kayaks to explore the city's waterways. There are only two options available to tourists that want to kayak in Ayutthaya. The Seven Seas Restaurant has two kayaks available for renting to tourists (www.ayutthaya-sevenseas.com). The starting point of this kayak tour begins at the Seven Seas Restaurant for this very reason. In addition, Nutty Adventures (www.ayutthaya-boat.com) offers some kayak and bicycle tours for those interested

If you would like information about lodging and restaurant options in Ayutthaya, please visit: www.ayutthaya-info.com. If you would like some information about lodging and restaurant options, please visit: www.ayutthaya-info.com.

Who are we?

Ayutthaya Historical Research [AHR] consists of a small group of researchers/writers with the aim to promote Ayutthaya's cultural heritage. We are local expatriates who have been living in Ayutthaya for many years and would like to share our knowledge with future visitors. Therefore, we have personally tested each of these suggested routes by cycling and/or walking. More information on the authors can be found at: <http://www.ayutthaya-history.com/Authors.html>

AYUTTHAYA – KHLONG TAKHIAN KAYAKING TRACK (Le Canal du Grand Cochon)

In emergency or accident:

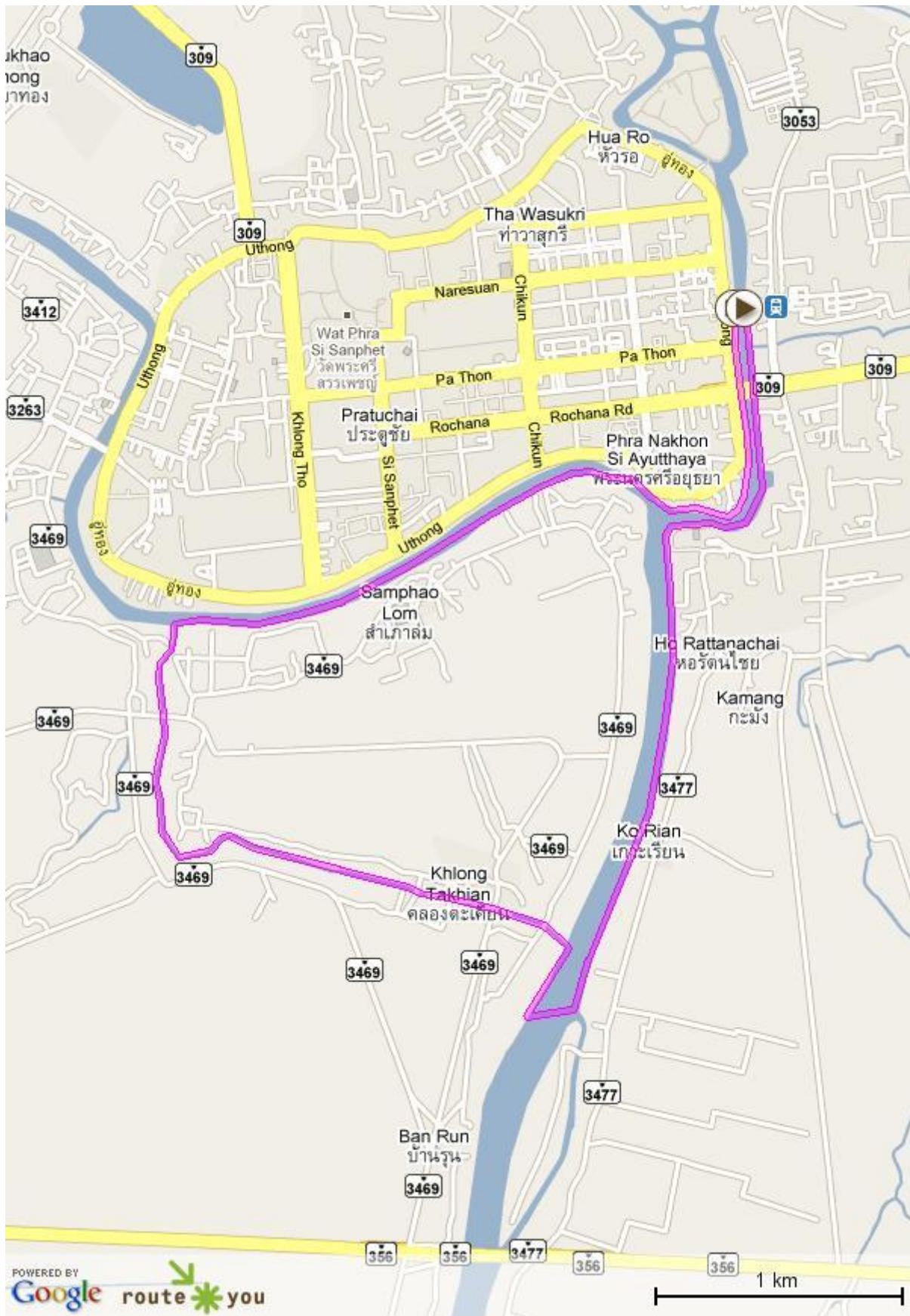
Contact the Ayutthaya Tourist Police Station: (035) 241-446, (035) 242-352 or 1155.



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AYUTTHAYA – KHLONG TAKHIAN KAYAKING TRACK (Le Canal du Grand Cochon)



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The route

Historical signboard in situ is marked as ()*

Entry fee required is marked as (\$)

Boat dock present marked as (+)

- ❖ *From the starting point, the Seven Seas Restaurant, kayak in the direction south along the Pa Sak River. On your left hand side, you will bypass Khlong Ban Bat and three active Buddhist monasteries - Wat Pichai, Wat Kluay, and Wat Ko Keaw - the latter will be situated at the mouth of Khlong Khao San. On your right hand side, you will see Wat Ratanachai. Chinese traders formed communities in these areas during the Ayutthaya period.*
- ❖ *The confluence between the Pa Sak and Chao Phraya Rivers is just ahead. Be cautious of fast moving water currents and whirlpools at the center. It is better to stay close the river bank on your left hand side. The first historic site is a large, active, monastery on the corner with giant catfish splashing nearby.*

Wat Phanan Choeng - Royal Chronicles mention the installation of a Buddha image at Wat Phanan Choeng in 1326, prior to the foundation of the Ayutthaya kingdom. As the story goes, the daughter of a Chinese emperor, Soi Dok Ma, was offered to a Thai king for marriage, but the Chinese princess felt insulted by the arrangement and killed herself. Wat Phanan Choeng was erected to mark the site of Soi Dok Ma's funeral service. Her image is on display on the second floor of a Chinese shrine on site. At the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767, about 2,000 Chinese locked themselves into a stockade at Wat Phanan Choeng to defend the city. However, the Burmese cut them off from supplies and reinforcements, so the Chinese were pressured to leave the temple. Burmese troops then killed them. Legend suggests that tears flowed from the eyes of the Buddha image at Wat Phanan Choeng once the city fell in 1767. It is still the largest sitting Buddha image in Ayutthaya. (+)

- ❖ *The next historical site is situated opposite of Wat Phanan Choeng, on the other side of the Chao Phraya River.*

Wat Bang Kaja (Monastery of the Kacha Village), spelled also as Kacha or Kaca, had fallen into decay before being repaired and renamed with the title, Wat Mai (New Monastery). It is strategically located on the confluence of the Chao Phraya River and the Pa Sak River, just opposite the Phet Fortress and the old harbor. This was a densely populated Chinese area close to many floating markets. The temple's highlights include an elaborately decorated open-air sermon hall and a large chedi. Traces of the original buildings can be seen behind the sermon hall. The head from an old Buddha images is viewable on the eastern side of the sermon hall. (+)

- ❖ *Continue kayaking south. You will see a boat yard on your left hand side. There is a small opening at the end of the yard. This is the best way to access the site of a Dutch Settlement.*

AYUTTHAYA – KHLONG TAKHIAN KAYAKING TRACK (Le Canal du Grand Cochon)

Dutch Settlement - The Dutch first came to Ayutthaya in 1604 during the reign of King Naresuan (1590-1605). They set up an East India Company (VOC) trading station in the city, which was known as “tuk daeng” for its red-colored lodge. The Dutch eventually prospered by transporting animal hides and other goods into Japan. King Prasat Thong requested that the Dutch supply Siam with shipbuilders who could craft western-style boats. However, Dutch-Siamese diplomatic relations became cloudy as the Dutch pressed to gain monopolies to counterbalance their declining profits. The Dutch moved out of their settlement shortly before the Burmese invasion in 1767. The Dutch lodge then became a stronghold for Chinese soldiers until it was destroyed by the Burmese.

- ❖ *Continue kayaking south on the Chao Phraya River. You will pass the site of the former British settlement on your left, but nothing remains of it today. It was situated on the corner of Khlong Suan Phlu (now partially buried). On the left, there will also be a small Chinese temple - San Chao Pho Khao Paknam Mae Bia. This Chinese temple existed during the Ayutthaya period for Teochiu merchants, but the current structure in situ is modern. A small “Franciscan” Portuguese settlement was located on the opposite of the river, but this has also been destroyed.*
- ❖ *Continue south for a bit longer and you will arrive at two boat docks. The site of the Japanese Settlement is on your left, and the site of the Dominican Portuguese settlement is on your right.*

Portuguese settlement - The ruins of the Dominican Church of San Petro were located within the Portuguese settlement. Portuguese came to Siam as early as 1511. Their ships arrived at the port of Ayutthaya with merchants, shipbuilders, and soldiers of fortune. The first Dominican missionaries arrived in Siam in 1567 and were given a place of residence. After the Burmese attack of Ayutthaya in 1569, new priests arrived and the Roman Catholic parish grew. The church of San Petro for the Dominican sect (locally called Ban Jacobin) was one of the three parishes set up in the Portuguese settlement. The settlement was destroyed during the Burmese attack of Ayutthaya in 1767. On 21 March 1767, the Dominican parish priest surrendered to the Burmese together with its Christians. Two days later the Dominican church was plundered. The renovated remains of the church are viewable at the basic foundation level. However, the highlight of this site is the graveyard containing a large number of skeletons. The skeletons include males, females, and children in layered positions that can be almost surrealistic to view. These excavations were done starting in the 1970s. A curious cross-cultural view is a spirit house with Christian figures inside. This area is considered haunted by some residents. (+)

Japanese Settlement - Japanese from Ryukyu (Okinawa) traded with Ayutthaya as far back as 1425. They sent 150 ships to Southeast Asian ports before shutting down trade in 1570 - after the first fall of Ayutthaya in 1569. Japanese returned once again during the reign of King Naresuan to establish trade and to work as hired soldiers and bodyguards. About 500 Japanese stormed the Royal Palace during the early reign of King Songtham (r.1610-1628) after their leader was executed. The Japanese were then forced to flee from the Japanese settlement. Trading relations between Siam and Japan were brought to an end in 1633 when the latter imposed a policy of isolation. Shortly afterward, a large number of Japanese Christians fled to

AYUTTHAYA – KHLONG TAKHIAN KAYAKING TRACK (Le Canal du Grand Cochon)

Ayutthaya to escape persecution at home. At its peak, the Japanese population numbered around 1,500. (+)

- ❖ *Continue kayaking south. On your left, you will see a Buddhist monastery called Wat Song Kuson. At this point, you should shift your kayak to the west side of the Chao Phraya River, as Khlong Takhian will be coming up on the right hand side. The site of a Portuguese Jesuit settlement will also be on the right hand side, but you will not be able to see it by kayak.*
- ❖ *When you have come to the lower mouth of Khlong Takhian, which will be on your right, you can immediately enter and start the second stage of this kayak trip. A second option is to continue kayaking south for another 10-15 minutes. There is an old Muslim historic site (also on the right) that will be of interest to a few kayakers.*

Masjid Takia Yokin, also known as Masjid Tiki, was established in 1610 by a Muslim Shiite from India (who embraced elements of Sufism). The mosque is named after a Buddhist monk who converted to Islam after being dazzled by magical feats performed by the mystical Muslim cleric. According to local legend, the Muslim performed miracles such as cracking up a fresh coconut to reveal live shrimp inside. The body of the Muslim mystic is said to be still entombed on site in an octagonal shrine marked by a domed roof. Thai Buddhists sometimes visit this shrine to pray for their wishes to be granted. If one comes true, the Buddhist will sometimes donate a few goats to the mosque. At one point, this mosque was a temple known as Wat Chetupon. King Chulalongkorn visited the site while boating down Khlong Thakian and had it repaired for the Sunni Muslims who had lived there since the reign of King Mongkut. He donated a ceremonial cabinet to the mosque that is still on site. (+)

- ❖ *Turn right, and head west into the lower mouth of Khlong Takhian. You will immediately see a mosque on your right hand side. This is Masjid Yamarudin. You may also see a second Muslim historic site nearby, Kudi Chao Fa. On the left hand side, there was once a village for Makassarese refugees before it was destroyed after they rebelled against King Narai in 1686. The next two sites are about 10 minutes west.*

Wat Khok Jindaram is an active Buddhist monastery situated on the opposite of Khlong Takhian from Masjid Yami Ul-Islam. Most structures in situ reflect the Ratanakosin period. Mirrored-tiles and large white walls are consistent features. The monastery's windows, gables, doorways, and roof are elaborately decorated in red, green, and blue and adorned with golden ornamentation. Golden images are placed above each window frame, and sema boundary markers are highlighted with a Wheel of Dharma. Curiously, there are two ordinations halls on site. Other stone carvings include a number of lions (Singh) on the staircase. A small golden Buddha image has been placed at its entrance, and a beautifully carved Buddha image can be found on one side of the ordination hall. Several small chedi are scattered around the monastery premises.

AYUTTHAYA – KHLONG TAKHIAN KAYAKING TRACK (Le Canal du Grand Cochon)

Masjid Yami Ul-Islam - This mosque is distinguished by its tall minarets, which is a rare feature among the mosques of Ayutthaya. It was founded beside Khlong Thakian in 1877 under the name of Masjid Al-Iqwan during the reign of Chulalongkorn. It was originally made of wood and much smaller, but the mustafa, called Kru Pa by most people, thought the building was getting old and damaged, so he raised a budget of approximately 500,000 baht for repairs. This expanded the mosque to multiple levels and added its distinctive minarets. It was then formally registered in July 1956. The size of its congregation expanded so much that prayer areas were set up outside in 1996. It can be visited from Wat Khok Jindaram by simply crossing the bridge between sites and making the first right hand turn.

- ❖ *The canal will continue westward along a scenic route for nearly a kilometer ahead. This section is filled with net-trap fisherman and livestock herders. The canal will curve in a hook-like shape toward the north. This area is especially prone to blockage from water hyacinth. If it is too thick and congested, you may have to turn back. Once you have made it past the hyacinths, you will kayak north toward the next historical site. It will be on the right hand side of the canal.*

Wat Samphao Lom or the "Monastery of the Capsized Junk" is an active temple with Buddhist clergy. The large ordination hall or ubosot has been completely renovated, though traces of its brick foundation and interior walls are still observable. This monastery's highlights are its beautifully decorated 3-D murals, and some of this artwork quite literally reaches out at you. Many scenes from Buddha's life (jakkatas) are elaborately portrayed in intricate detail. This monastery was built when people moved here from Bang Kaja, where the sinking of boats was a problem due to the fast moving confluence of Pa Sak and Chao Phraya rivers. Wat Samphao Lom's name refers to sunken boats, but it is also known as Wat Tham Mai (newly made monastery).

- ❖ *Continue north. You will pass underneath a concrete bridge for motor traffic. Afterwards, there are 1-2 wooden bridges that lay low. These can be difficult to navigate when the water level is high. You sometimes have to disembark and push your kayak beneath it. At other times, you might have to remove a few planks of wood to make room (make sure to put them back afterward). Locals sometimes drag fishing nets across the canal at this point, which can contribute to the building up of water hyacinth as well. The next historic site will be on the left hand side of the canal.*

Wat Klang Khlong Takhian is an active monastery with Buddhist clergy. There is not much known about its history or date of foundation. It was situated on the opposite side of the Chao Phraya River from Wat Wang Chai, which was the estate of King Chakkraphat before being crowned in 1548. In addition, an Ayutthaya-period brothel was located opposite of Wat Klang Khlong Takhian, across from the canal, closer to St Joseph's Church. The modern highlights of Wat Klang Khlong Takhian include a large trunk of a Thakian tree that is believed to contain the spirit of a female ghost. (+)

AYUTTHAYA – KHLONG TAKHIAN KAYAKING TRACK (Le Canal du Grand Cochon)

- ❖ *You will emerge shortly from the northern mouth of Khlong Takhian. This brings you back to the Chao Phraya River. It is better to kayak on your right hand side for the next stage of this trip, as the most important historic sites are on this side. The next one is situated immediately to the right after returning to the Chao Phraya River. If the water is low, you can see beside the riverbank a discarded cement crucifix with a brass marker.*

St Joseph's Church - In 1665, Siamese King Narai granted French bishops a spot near the Chao Phraya River in the Cochin Chinese quarter called "Ban Plahet". In 1665-1666, they built the Seminary of Saint Joseph (later renamed as the Seminary of the Holy Angels). In 1673, King Narai granted another piece of land and offered assistance in building the wooden St. Joseph's Church, which was renovated with bricks in the European style between 1685 and 1695. In March, 1767, the St Joseph seminary was surrounded by attacking Burmese. The settlement fought bravely, but they were few and short of ammunition. After parlaying with the Burmese General and being promised safety and protection for all persons and property, the bishop surrendered on 23 March. The church and seminary, as well as the Jesuit and Dominican churches, were nevertheless plundered. The houses near the church, mostly used by Vietnamese converts were burned down. The fire spread to the church and seminary which were both reduced to ashes. Father Jean-Baptist Pallegoix began restoring the church in 1831, which was completed by 1847. The church has been a place of continuous Catholic worship in Thailand for over 300 years. Hundreds of Christians and many of the missionary priests were buried at the local churchyard. (+)

- ❖ *Kayak in the direction east along the Chao Phraya River. The next stop will be on the right hand side.*

Wat Phuttaisawan is situated opposite the mouth of Khlong Chakrai Yai, presently called Khlong Tho, a canal linking the former Lopburi River (presently Khlong Muang) with the Chao Phraya River and runs adjacent the former Royal Palace grounds. The temple was built in 1353 AD by King Ramathibodi I at the royal residence of "Wiang Lek", the site where he first settled before establishing Ayutthaya as the capital city in 1350. The temple was constructed after his elder brother defeated the Khmers and brought war captives back in 1352. The monastery was possibly one of the first temples constructed in the Ayutthaya Kingdom and has a preaching hall and a great holy reliquary. The Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya mention that the army of the King of Ava invaded Ayutthaya in 1549 and set up a stockade in this area. It was also taken by the Burmese during the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767. (+)

- ❖ *Continue kayaking east. Keep alert to the long-tail boats that offer ferryboat crossing in the area, since they don't always pay attention to kayakers in their path. You will soon pass by the Islam Vattana Mosque on your right. Keep kayaking on the Chao Phraya River and you will come to the next historical reference point. It will also be on your right hand side, and a large ferry boat will be carrying motorcycles and pedestrians to and away from it.*

AYUTTHAYA – KHLONG TAKHIAN KAYAKING TRACK (Le Canal du Grand Cochon)

Wat Khun Phrom is an active monastery situated along the Chao Phraya River. The ordination hall is built in the Late Ayutthaya style (1629-1767). The monastery was originally established in 1557. Its highlight is the two Dvaravati-style images at the staircase leading to its sermon hall. One of the originals can be seen at the Chao Sam Phraya Museum. (+)

- ❖ *Go east from Wat Khun Phrom. The next historic site will be a small and active Buddhist monastery on your right. This will be the last official Point of Interest on this route.*

Wat Nang Kui is an active temple located along the Chao Phraya River. The monastery was built in 1587 with the sponsorship of a wealthy woman called Lady Kui. The monastery was left empty after the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767 until it was renovated during the Reign of King Rama III. (1824-1851). Wat Nang Kui is known for its sandstone Buddha image, which is believed to have been discovered underwater by a monk. One Buddha image in situ has a highly distinctive and unusual smile (Luang Phor Yim). One highlight at this temple is a large carving from the trunk of a Takhian tree (Mae Takhian Thong). Locals claim that a female spirit with magical powers still lives in this wood. (+)

- ❖ *Continue kayaking east. You will return to the confluence of the Pa Sak and Chao Phraya River once again. On your right, you will pass by Wat Bang Kaja. Feel free to visit this active Buddhist monastery if you missed at the beginning of the route. At this point, you will also see a large brick fortress on the left.*

Pom Phet (Fortress) - The brick walls of Pom Phet were built around 1580. Archaeological evidence suggests that the original walls were 6.5 meters thick. It was strategically located at the confluence of the Chao Phraya and Pa Sak River - an important harbor area used by foreign ships. On the ground floor of Pom Phet there were eight cannons and another eight between the crenulations on top. It has been recently renovated in 2010.

- ❖ **Return Route** - *It is easier to swing over to Pom Phet and return to the Pa Sak River from the river bank on that side. The water current tends to be less swift on the western part of the Pa Sak even during rainy season. You will clearly see Wat Phanan Choeng on the opposite side. Once you have made it around the bend you will recognize the earlier temples from this route - including Wat Ratanachai, Wat Ko Keaw, Wat Kluay, and Wat Pichai. You will also bypass both Khlong Khao San and Khlong Ban Bat once again. Continue kayaking north toward the Pridi Banomyong Bridge. The starting point is on the right hand side just after the bridge.*



AYUTTHAYA – KHLONG TAKHIAN KAYAKING TRACK (Le Canal du Grand Cochon)

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