

AYUTTHAYA HISTORICAL RESEARCH [AHR]

AYUTTHAYA  
NORTH EASTERN  
BICYCLE TRACK

THE NORTHERN AYODHYA LOOP

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# AYUTTHAYA - NORTH EASTERN BICYCLE TRACK

## (The Northern Ayodhya Loop)

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This bicycle tour is designed to bring you beside some of the most important historical sites - in the north-eastern rim of Ayutthaya's city island. There is a high concentration of ruins and active temples in this small area, which makes this tour pleasant and full of architectural surprises.

The area was probably already populated during the Dvaravati era (6th to the 11th centuries). There is evidence that a community settled in this area much earlier than 1351 – the official date of establishment of the city of Ayutthaya. Sources suggest that the Khmers occupied the area as early as 850-1000 AD and established an outpost here, naming it Ayodhya after the ancient and one of the holiest Hindu cities of India (the old capital of Awadh in the Faizabad district of Uttar Pradesh). This ancient Ayodhya community was situated on the stretch of land formed by Khlong Hantra, Khlong Ban Bat (Kamang) and the Pa Sak River.

The area was later invaded by Anawrahta, the King of Pagan (r.1044-1077) and controlled by the "Burmese" for about a hundred years. After the Burmese influence waned, it was conquered once again by the Khmer and held until the mid 13th century. The Tai seized political power shortly afterward by combining the Lavo and Suphannaphum Kingdoms. When King U-Thong arrived at Wiang Lek in 1347, a number of architectural structures already existed.

The tour will take 3 to 4 hours depending on the time spent at each location point. Riders may not want to stop at every highlight listed on this tour itinerary. A few sites have been listed more for the sake of smoother navigation. Individual cyclists 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](http://www.ayutthaya-history.com).

### **Tips and Warnings**

Bicycles can be rented in different locations on Soi 2 Naresuan Rd, which is the starting point of this tour. It is also possible to rent bikes near the train station, which is closer to the area of this tour. Bike rental costs 30-40 baht (about \$1) per day on average, which makes bike touring an inexpensive way to see the city. Ayutthaya's terrain is mostly flat and easy to ride, but many streets and side roads are poorly marked, so use the map to simplify navigation.

Be cautious as traffic in and around Ayutthaya is sometimes chaotic and dangerous. Motor vehicles often fail to see cyclists and pedestrians, so you must closely watch out for *them*. Motorcycles are a particular cause of local accidents. Dogs and potholes can also be dangerous, especially in remote areas. Weather can be very hot, so make sure to drink plenty of fluids and wear sun block. It is inadvisable to drive at night due to the lack of lighting.

The theft of bicycles is uncommon in Ayutthaya, but backpacks and cameras have been stolen on rare occasions. It is best to keep valuables with you when visiting the temples on route.

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If you would like some information about lodging and restaurant options, please visit: [www.ayutthaya-info.com](http://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>

## **In emergency or accident:**

Contact the Ayutthaya Tourist Police Station: 035/241446, 035/242352 or 1155.

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## The route

*Historical signboard in situ is marked as (\*)*

*Entry fee required is marked as (\$)*

- ❖ *From the starting point, drive your bicycle past Chao Phrom Market to U-Thong Road (the street that circles the city island). Make a right hand turn and go south until you come to the first side road (soi) on the left. This will take you to the ferry crossing point. The ferry boat currently costs 4 baht on foot and an extra 2 baht to carry on your bicycle. The ferry boat is a short and pleasant ride that leads to a point in front of the train station. It is not a problem to carry your bike onto the ferry boat, but there is also the possibility of renting a bicycle near the train station if you prefer.*
- ❖ *Walk your bike to the train station on the other side of the road. There is a small path leading over the rail tracks. This is the safest point to cross. The key landmark is a monastic structure that can be easily seen on the other side of the rail tracks. This is the first reference point of this tour.*

**Wat Luang Phor Kho Hak** or the "Monastery of the Buddha with the Broken Neck" is also locally known as Luang Phor Suriyamuni. This small monastic structure was part of Wat Chang or the Monastery of the Elephant in earlier times.

- ❖ *From the train tracks and reference point you will make a short left hand turn, and then make a right quickly afterward. Start heading east for a few minutes. This small road will have a few natural turns in it, but keep to the east. In 2-3 minutes you will see a large pond. Stay with the road as it will naturally meander to the main road used for the tour. At the next intersection, where the pond ends, make a left and head north.*
- ❖ *Note: on the right hand side, to the south, you will be able to see a large bell-shaped chedi known as Wat Sam Plum. This is the Rojana Road intersection. You won't visit this site as part of this tour, but it is a useful point if you want to extend this route to our full day tour.*
- ❖ *The first point of interest (heading north) is only a moment away on your left hand side. It is an active temple located directly beside the road.*

**Wat Samanakottharam** is an active temple with portions of ancient buildings still in situ. One of its oldest structures is a unique bell-shaped chedi, which could date as early as the 14th-15th century. There is also a portion of a second chedi on site, but it has greatly eroded. One ancient sermon hall has been restored to the basic foundation level, and a large Buddha image has been placed on its altar. The history of Wat Samanakottharam is unclear. Written accounts are vague and require further investigation. It is implied that Royal Chronicles refer to this monastery during the reign of King Narai (r.1656-1688). (\*)

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- ❖ *From Wat Samanakottharam, return to the previous road and continue north. The next Point of Interest, Wat Kudi Dao, is only a few minutes away on the left hand side of the road. It is large ruin situated directly beside the road.*
- ❖ *Note: Wat Kudi Dao will later serve as an important landmark and reference point for future steps of this bike tour. Keep it in mind as a later navigation point.*

**Wat Kudi Dao** or the "Monastery of the Star Dormitory" is a restored ruin with many structures and chedi still in situ. Behind the monastery's main entrance gate is a large sermon hall with its enormous columns still intact. Behind this sermon hall is the principal chedi, constructed in the Sri Lankan style. Recent excavations suggest that Wat Kudi Dao was built on the foundation of earlier buildings that predated the foundations of Ayutthaya. However, Royal Chronicles fail to mention it until King Thai Sa's reign (r.1709-1733). The restorations at Wat Kudi Dao began in 1711 and were completed in 1715. Royal Chronicles report that, when the renovations at Wat Kudi Dao were finished, a seven-day festival was held to celebrate its completion. Holy acts of merit were performed by giving alms and making offerings of worship. King Borommakot, who was crowned in 1733, is closely associated with this temple, since it where he most likely served as a novice monk. (\*)

- ❖ *The next Reference Point can be seen just north of Wat Kudi Dao at the intersection. However, turn left before reaching this large ruin because the next Point of Interest is located down the side road.*

In situ we find the ordination hall (Th: ubosot) and the principal chedi of **Wat Jakrawat**. The ubosot measures 30 m in length by 16 m in width and faces east. On its west side stands the principal chedi. The whole complex is surrounded by an outer wall or crystal wall measuring 55 m by 35 m and by a moat. Following excavations conducted by the Fine Arts Department, the monastery has been restored three times and probably dates from the Early Ayutthaya Period (1351 - 1491). (\*)

- ❖ *After turning left and heading west for a short distance, you will see an active temple close to Wat Jakrawat (on your right hand side). Turn into its gravel parking lot because this is the next point of interest.*

As an active temple, **Wat Pradu Songtham** has most of the usual structures found at a Buddhist monastery. A sermon hall, bell tower, and monk's quarters are in situ. Most of these are designed in a style reflecting the Bangkok period. The central feature of this monastery is its mural-decorated ordination hall. The murals at Wat Pradu Songtham were painted in 1863. These have greatly deteriorated, but they still provide remarkable images of the lives of Buddha (*Jataka*) and Siamese culture during the Ayutthaya period. The murals of an elephant procession are especially prized. There are some modern chedi in the courtyard west of the ordination hall and colorful renditions of *Naga* images on staircases.

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- ❖ *Return to Wat Jakrawat once again, but this time make a left and continue north on the original road. The next Reference Point is small but still visible ruin beside the road on the left hand side. It might also help to notice the large graveyard for spirit houses directly across the road. Locals place these broken or damaged shrines at this spot so that the ghosts dwelling within will be contained in a holy area.*

**Wat Bot Racha Decha** is an east-oriented ruin with a Buddhist memorial built on top of its structure. A broken chedi with its toppled 9-tiered spire and foundations of a monastic structure can be found in situ.

- ❖ *Take a left at Wat Bot Racha Decha. Continue west on this small side road for 2-3 minutes. Just before it comes to a dead end, the road will veer to the north. You will likely see the top of a large bell-shaped chedi in a forested area. It should be on your left-hand side. This site may be worth visiting for the more adventurous cyclist, since it remains mostly unexcavated and provides an idea of how these ruins look before heavy restorations have been made. A small dirt path leads to it, but explore this site with caution as these jungle areas can be homes to poisonous snakes.*
- ❖ *Note: it is also possible to bypass this step by staying with the main road leading north from Wat Bot Racha Decha. In this case, the next Point of Interest will be located just ahead on the left hand side of the road.*

**Wat Viharn Khao**, or the Monastery of the White Sermon Hall, stands in line with the large chedi at Wat Ayodhya, which could be an indication that this ruin could have once been part of a larger monastery. In situ are a brick mound covered with vegetation and the remnants of a bell-shaped chedi. Its style is associated with the Middle Ayutthaya period, although there are no records of its original construction or its historical background.

- ❖ *From the previous reference point, continue biking on the small side road. It will quickly turn east toward the next Point of Interest, which will be only a minute or two away. You will enter at the rear of an active temple and see a large unique chedi in full view.*

**Wat Ayodhya** is a temple still in use by the Buddhist clergy. The architectural highlight is its main chedi with a bell-shaped dome resting on an octagonal pedestal. The stucco design of the dome resembles lotus flowers. A square base (without walls or staircases) supports the main chedi and its four smaller inter-cardinal satellites. It is estimated that this chedi once stood to a height of 30 meters. Behind the chedi lies a brick mound, which was once a vihara, topped with a small Buddha image. Other old structures remaining include two redented pillars (about 2.5 m in height at the eastern entrance) and two chedis built in the reign of King Rama V to contain the ashes of the abbot of that time and his relatives. The new ordination hall was rebuilt upon the ruins of the old ordination hall during the Ratanakosin era. Behind the ordination hall are the remains of a chedi, a three meter high base, built in the late Ayutthaya style. Many historians believe and publications indicate that this temple was once an important temple referred to as Wat Deun or Wat Doem.

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- ❖ *Return to the main road and continue north. The next Point of Interest is only a few minutes away on the left hand side.*

**Wat Dusitaram** earns its name from the Sanskrit word referring to the "Tushita Heaven", the joyful heaven above the earth in which near perfect beings, who are about to become Buddhas, pass their last angelic life before being born on earth to assume the Buddha hood. The monastery's area is quite big, with old and new parts. In the old part, we find a large chedi, a vihara and an ordination hall or ubosot. The bell-shaped chedi is built in Ayutthayan style. Once, a large vihara stood west of this tall chedi. On its ancient foundations a new open hall has been built, sheltering some Buddha images. On the north side stands the former ordination hall or ubosot. It was built in a mixture of the Early and Late Ayutthaya styles. Archaeological excavation indicates that this temple was repaired in the Middle Ayutthaya period, or in the end of reign of King Phumintharacha (r. 1709-1733), or possibly during King Borommakot's reign (r. 1733-1758).

- ❖ *After exiting Wat Dusitaram, you will shift to the return stage of this bike route. Do not cross the bridge to the north. Instead, turn right on the main road and start heading south in the opposite direction.*
- ❖ *Continue biking until you come to the intersection with Wat Kudi Dao and Wat Jakrawat. However, this time, turn left and start heading east. Within 2-3 minutes you will arrive at Wat Maheyong. The road will split in two directions. Take the left turn to view the next Point of Interest.*

**Wat Sika Samud** is located just north of Wat Maheyong. The monastery is surrounded by a moat which following the Fine Arts Department description in situ, was used as sema - a boundary for doing religious rites - called U-Thok sema (U-Thok is royal language for water). The site consists of an ubosot or ordination hall and a principal pagoda on the west. According to archeological evidence, this temple was built in the Early Ayutthaya Period. (\*)

- ❖ *The main entrance to Wat Maheyong is now located further ahead on the right, where a popular meditation center is now located. This temple has recently become a site requiring admission fees. The previous entrance is now blocked off by barbed wire and a locked gate.*

It is believed by some researchers that **Wat Maheyong** predated the foundation of the Ayutthaya kingdom; however, following the Luang Prasoet chronicles, the monastery was built in 1438 A.D. at the start of the reign of King Borommaratcha II (r.1424-1448) of the Suphannaphum Dynasty. During the Burmese war in 1568-1569, the main army of King Bayin Naung encamped at the Maheyong Monastery. He set up his pavilion at the temple and it was here that King Mahin (r. 1568-1569) presented himself to the Burmese King after the fall of the capital on 30 August 1569. King Mahin and the royal family were taken captive to Pegu, but unfortunately the King died of fever on route. Maha Thammaracha of Phitsanulok, who joined forces with Bayin Naung against Ayutthaya, was set up as a vassal King. Wat Maheyong later underwent major restoration in the reign of King Thai Sa. (\*) (\$)



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- ❖ *The next temple can be reached by returning to the fork in the road in front of Wat Maheyong. This time make a right into the field just ahead. A large bell-shaped chedi will be in clear view to the south. This is the next Point of Interest.*
- ❖ *Note: A few cyclists may also be curious about a small two story building between Wat Maheyong and Wat Chang. This Reference Point is known as Tamnak Maheyong.*

Wat Chang or the "Monastery of the Elephant" was given its name due to the elephant statues that once encircled its main chedi. The temple is listed as being built during the reign of King Borommatrailokanat (r.1448-1488), at a time when Sukhothai was being absorbed into Ayutthaya as a vassal state. However some sources believe that Wat Chang was constructed even earlier - perhaps before the founding of Ayutthaya itself. Standing Buddha images were found at this temple, which resemble those of the Sukhothai Kingdom. Wat Chang was restored a number of times during the late Ayutthaya period. King Phumintharacha (r.1709-1733) is one monarch who contributed to repair work.

- ❖ *It will be obvious to any cyclist that there is plenty of activity going on directly west of Wat Chang. A new elephant camp has been built in the area that is getting a lot of attention recently. You can make your own choice whether to visit this establishment or not.*

Pang Chang is a new elephant camp that has recently opened in the Northeast area. In addition to providing elephant rides in the vicinity of Wat Chang, this establishment also has several live tigers on display (charging a fee for photographs). The elephant camp also provides snake shows on occasion. The elephant camp in situ derives its name from the temple in area. However, it should not be confused with the elephant kraal at Phaniat or other elephant camps of historical significance during the Ayutthaya period. This is a modern site.

- ❖ *Observant cyclists might also spot a bizarre fairy tale house in this area (behind the place with snooker tables). It might provide some interesting material for photographs, but it isn't part of this bike route.*
- ❖ *Cyclists can make their own choice for the next step of this tour:*
  - *Option One: You can return to the intersection in front of Wat Kudi Dao and make a left, heading south on the main road until the next Point of Interest. In this case, you would turn left at the small side road across the street from the cement factory (and near the large pond that you biked past earlier). This side road will head into a scenic canal, Khlong Wat Nam Kham. The next Point of Interest will be within easy view. Just bike along the canal until you arrive at the bridge, then cross it to the other side.*
  - *Option Two: If you want to visit the elephant camp, walk your bike over the small mound used by elephants west of Wat Chang. From here, you can bike*

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*west until arriving at the main road. Turn left and continue until you come to the same side road across the street from the cement factory. Turn left once again and the road will lead to the same scenic canal. Bike along the canal until you arrive at the bridge, then cross it (as in option one).*

Wat Nang Kham or the "Monastery of the Mistress Kham" is a restored ruin located in Tambon Phailing, close to the bank of the Ban Bat canal. Following archaeological evidence found in situ, this temple was built in the Early Ayutthaya period. Restoration took place in the reign of King Borommakot.

- ❖ ***Final Step:** Return to the main road from Wat Nam Kham, and then turn left. You will head south a short distance before seeing the large pond that you biked past earlier.*
  - ❖ *If you are on the half day tour, simply turn right at the large pond and backtrack the same route to get back to the train station. You can return by ferry boat with the same route used previously. However, we recommend that you cut back on traffic risks by bypassing Chao Phrom Market. Head north for one block and then turn left on Pa Maprao Road. You will then the next left at the first road you come past. This returns you to the starting point.*
  - ❖ *If you are on the full day tour, simply continue south toward the large bell-shaped chedi that can be clearly seen in the middle of Rojana Road. This is Wat Sam Plum. See Ayutthaya Eastern Bicycle Track for additional directions.*
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### *Disclaimer*

*AHR will not be held liable for any loss or damage whatsoever for any suggestions made in relation to the site's promotion of ecotourism. It is the responsibility of the user of the site to take the necessary precautions to avoid any physical injury, traffic incident, animal attack, theft, and damage to equipment. Any reliance on the site's information is therefore strictly at your own risk. Read our disclaimer at website [www.ayutthaya-history.com](http://www.ayutthaya-history.com).*