

AYUTTHAYA HISTORICAL RESEARCH

AYUTTHAYA
SOUTH EASTERN
BICYCLE TRACK

History of Ayutthaya

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WWW.AYUTTHAYA-HISTORY.COM

AYUTTHAYA - SOUTH EASTERN BICYCLE TRACK

(The Southern Ayodhya Loop)

This bicycle tour has been designed to introduce some of the most important historical sites and foreign settlements in the southeastern rim of Ayutthaya's city island. The tour will take 3 to 4 hours depending on the time spent at each location point. A few highlights on this itinerary have been listed more for the sake of smoother navigation and referencing, although they may also appeal to many bicyclists as points of interest. Therefore, individual cyclists can choose where to stop according to their own tastes and time constraints.

Similar to the northeast area, this section of the city possibly existed prior to King U-Thong's foundation of the Ayutthaya kingdom in 1351. Evidence suggests that it may have been populated as early as the Dvaravati era (6th to the 11th centuries); and that the Khmers latter set up an outpost here as early as 850-1100 AD. This Khmer city was named 'Ayodhya' after one of the holiest Hindu cities of India (the old capital of Awadh in the Faizabad district of Uttar Pradesh).

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.

Evidence also suggests that Chinese merchants set up in the southeastern area as an important stopping point for conducting trade with the Sukhothai kingdom. These ancient Ayodhya communities were situated on the stretch of land formed by Khlong Hantra, Khlong Ban Bat (Kamang), Khlong Khao San, and Khlong Suan Phlu. This area was originally connected to the city island, since the Pa Sak River had yet to be dug for defensive and navigational purposes. However, the boundaries of the ancient city are still subject of debate.

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.

Tips and Warnings

Bicycles can be rented in different locations on Soi 2 Naresuan Rd, which is the starting point 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 particularly nasty cause of local accidents. Dogs and potholes can also cause problems, 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 proper city lighting.

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

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>

In emergency or accident:

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

Disclaimer

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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.*
- ❖ *From the ferry boats, go to the train station and turn right. You will quickly cross a small bridge leading over Khlong Ban Bat. The first reference point is an active Buddhist temple on the right hand side of the road.*

Wat Phichai Songkhram or the “Monastery of War Victory” is a temple still in use by the monastic clergy. It is a classic built temple with an ordination and sermon hall. A copper plate at the monastery indicates that it was built shortly before the final war between Burma and Ayutthaya in 1765. The temple is mentioned in the Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya as being the place where the Phraya of Kamphaeng Phet (later King Taksin) with his followers set up camp in December 1766. Phraya Kamphaeng Phet, convinced that Ayutthaya would soon be lost to the Burmese, decided to seek his fortune by escaping south. Folk tale states that he went to pray at Wat Phichai to seek good fortune in his planned escape to the south.

- ❖ *Continue south on the same road until arriving at Rochana Road (also the Pridi Banomyong Bridge). For safety reasons, it is advisable to turn right at Krung Sri River Hotel and curve around the bridge, turning right on the first road you come to in order to resume biking south. It is also possible, however, to keep going forward to reach the same spot by going under the bridge. Either way, the next reference point will be on the right hand side of the road.*

Wat Kluey or the "Banana Monastery" is situated on the east bank of the Pa Sak River. The temple is mentioned in the Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya as being the place where the Siamese Luang Saraseni and his followers set up camp in December 1766 prior to the fall of Ayutthaya, at par with Phraya Kamphaeng Phet.

- ❖ *Continue on the same road south. You will cross a small bridge over Khlong Khao San before coming to the first Point of Interest on this route. The turn off is on the right hand side of the road and clearly marked.*

Wat Ko Kaew or the "Monastery of the Crystal Island" is situated on the east bank of the Pa Sak River on an island formed by Khlong Khao San in the north and Khlong Thanon Tan in

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the south, and confluence at the mouth of Khlong Dusit. In situ is a large and prosperous monastic complex. Ko Kaew is mentioned a few times in the Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya as a strategic location where the Burmese positioned part of their army when attacking Ayutthaya.

- ❖ *Immediately after exiting Wat Ko Kaew, on the right hand side of the road, there is another structure that has fallen into ruin. However, this small structure may be of interest to some bicyclists since it is little known but still in good shape.*

Wat Prasat or the “Monastery of the Palace” is situated close to the active temple Wat Ko Kaew and would have been accessible by using Khlong Khao San or the Pa Sak River. This ruin has been partially renovated and metal scaffolding keeps its four walls from collapsing. In situ is a single sermon hall aligned in an east-west axis. All four walls have been fairly well-preserved, but the roof has totally collapsed.

- ❖ *Continue south for a few minutes. You will cross a small bridge leading over Khlong Thanon Tan, and shortly afterward you will arrive at an important intersection beside the railroad tracks. Traffic can be very busy at this spot on weekends, so use some caution when navigating. Make a right and head west (in the opposite direction of the railroad tracks). This will lead you to the next Point of Interest.*

Wat Phanan Choeng - Following the Luang Prasoet version of the Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya, Phra Phanan Choeng was built in 1324 (26 years before King U-Thong founded Ayutthaya). The Buddha image originally stood in the open. The Buddha image - made of brick and mortar and covered with stucco - sits in the classic posture of Subduing Mara. It measures (approx) 14 meters at the lap and 19 meters in height including the ornament above the head. Thai people call it “Luang Phor To” or “Great Reverend Father”, Chinese or Thais of Chinese origin call it “Sam Po Kong”. It is one of the largest, oldest, most beautiful and revered Buddha images of Thailand. The story goes that the image shed tears when the Burmese took Ayutthaya in 1767.

- ❖ *The next reference point can be seen directly across the street from the Wat Phanan Choeng exit. It is shown on this route simply because people will see it and may wonder about this site.*

Wat Monthop was a ruin situated closely southeast of Wat Phanan Choeng. It is now viewed as part of the larger temple. In situ are a very large Chinese graveyard and a small Chinese shrine. The remains of the ruin known as Wat Monthop have been placed at an open-air structure in the center of the graveyard. Its Buddha image can be seen from the road. This site is viewed as haunted by ghosts by many locals.

- ❖ *Turn right at Wat Phanan Choeng. This road (Highway 3059) will gradually start turning south. On the right hand side of the road, there is a boat yard used for*

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construction. Turn right into the boatyard and then make a sharp left southward. This dirt path will lead to the Dutch Settlement. Occasionally, a small gate will block this road from bicycles. If this occurs while you are visiting, simply walk your bike a short distance through the boat yard. The Dutch Settlement is to the south.

The Dutch Settlement - In April, 1633, Joost Schouten, the Dutch VOC Chief-trader, was instructed to build a permanent trading post at Ayutthaya. One year later a two-storey brick building enclosed by a stockade was ready and was called "the lodge". The lodge was special because it was a stone construction, which gave it a "high-status", as in Ayutthaya only the monasteries and palaces were made of stone. The VOC-factory was located north of the English trading post and the Japanese settlement – outside the city walls of Ayutthaya.

By 1732, the territory of the company accommodated 240 families, in total 1,443 people. The Burmese attacked Siam's capital in 1760, and the VOC's trading post was greatly plundered. However, the post continued to serve its purpose until the end of the company's presence in Ayutthaya in 1765. The last VOC ships left Ayutthaya in November 1765. The area of the Dutch lodge was latter a scene of heavy fighting against the Burmese in 1767.

A memorial was built at the old VOC settlement during modern times. Some of the foundations of the destroyed factory have been excavated, but most of the remnants still remain buried as unexplored witnesses of a Dutch adventurous past.

- ❖ *Go back to the main road (Highway 3059). Turn right and continue south. You will pass a small bridge over Khlong Suan Phlu (note: this is the approximate location where the British settlement used to be). The Japanese settlement will be located on the right hand side of the road.*

The Japanese settlement is situated on the east bank of the Chao Phraya River in an area called Ko Rian. It was located opposite the Portuguese settlement and was separated from the English and Dutch settlement by the Suan Phlu canal to the north. The Japanese village ran one Km along the river, and extended about half a kilometer inland. The settlement was surrounded by canals on the three sides. Its population numbered at the peak of the Siamese-Japanese trade in the first part of the 17th century around 1,500. Trade export consisted of sappan wood, used as dye, lead, tin, forest products and deer hides, used by Japanese warriors to make coats, gloves and firearm cases.

- ❖ *(Note: one of the three Portuguese churches was located directly opposite of the Japanese Settlement, on the other side of the Chao Phraya River. This site can still be seen today).*
- ❖ *Some cyclists may find it worth a quick diversion to view a small but interesting ruin nearby. It will add another 10-15 minutes to the main route. To see it, continue biking south from the Japanese settlement towards an active temple named Wat Kok Yai Luk. On the left, there is a small road marked by a large tree in the center of it. This is the site of one of the many hidden ruins in Ayutthaya.*

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Wat Khok Keaw is single monastic structure that has fallen into ruin. It is marked by an enormous Bodhi tree that has nearly engulfed the former temple. You can view part of this temple hidden within its roots and branches. A shrine with a Buddha image has been placed on its eastern side. The road curves around the structure symbolizing how the modern city has been shaped around its ancient sites.

- ❖ *Return to the main road from the Japanese Settlement. This time turn left and start heading north. You will backtrack for about 10-15 minutes, passing Wat Phanan Choeng in the process. You will eventually arrive at the important intersection beside the railroad tracks (where you turned west earlier). This time go over the railroad tracks toward the east. Stay with this busy road until it splits. Turn left and you will promptly see Wat Yai Chai Mongkhon.*

Wat Yai Chai Mongkhon (Great Monastery of Auspicious Victory) has been called many names in the past: Wat Pa Kaeo, Wat Chao Phraya Thai and Wat Yai Chaya Mongkhon. In the year 1357, two princes of Ayutthaya, Chao Kaeo and Chao Thai, died of cholera. King Ramathibodhi I (r. 1350 - 1369) ordered the bodies of both princes to be exhumed and a monastery be established at their cremation site. He gave the monastery the name "Wat Pa Kaeo" or the Monastery of the Crystal Forest. The temple became the home of Buddhist monks ordained and trained in Ceylon (present Sri Lanka). The king conferred the title of "Right side Supreme Patriarch" to the head of the group, Somdet Phra Wanarat. The monastery became known as "Wat Chao Phya Thai" - The Monastery of the Supreme Patriarch.

This temple was repeatedly involved in the history of Ayutthaya. It was here that conspirators gathered in 1548 to consult an oracle whether or not to overthrow the throne usurper Khun Worawongsa and Queen Thao Sri Sudachan; which resulted in Prince Tienracha becoming king in 1549, crowned with the title King Maha Chakkraphat. In 1561, the Patriarch of this monastery fixed the auspicious moment for Prince Sri Sin, the youngest son of the previous King Chai Racha and Queen Thao Sri Sudachan, to overthrow King Maha Chakkraphat. Prince Sri Sin was captured during the rebellion and died in the palace, and the Patriarch was executed for his involvement. In 1592, King Naresuan (r. 1590-1605) defeated the Burmese Army at Nong Sarai by killing the Burmese Crown Prince in single-handed combat on elephant. In the battle the King and his brother King Ekathotsarot got separated from their army officers. On return to Ayutthaya the King wanted to punish to death his officers, but the Supreme Patriarch intervened and requested that the punishment be suspended; which King Naresuan granted. It is assumed that King Naresuan ordered the restoration and enlargement of the temple and the principal chedi. The chedi was named Phra Chedi Chaya Mongkhon. Presumably this celebration gave rise to the temple's new name, Wat Yai Chaya Mongkhon - The Great Temple of Auspicious Victory.

- ❖ *Cyclists have the option of seeing another temple near Wat Yai Chai Mongkhon. There are two ways to view it. Turn right at the fork in the road and cycle for a few minutes. You will be able to see a large bell-shaped chedi on the left hand side of the road.*

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However, to physically visit this ruin, it is better to use a road located directly inside the Wat Yai Chai Mongkhon compound.

Wat Bot Daeng is a deserted monastery. This temple's name suggests the existence of former red ubosot, but no trace of it remains today. The surviving architectural structure is a large bell-shaped chedi. This style is usually attributed to the middle Ayutthaya period, but a sign posted by the Fine Arts Department claims that Wat Bot Daeng actually belongs to an earlier period and that its location next to Wat Yai shows it played a more important role.

- ❖ *Continue cycling north from Wat Yai Chai Mongkhon. This main road is busy but unavoidable. On the left hand side of the road, you might see a small ruin if you are biking slowly. This is deserted monastery is known as Wat Dusit. It is located directly beside the road.*

Wat Dusit is a deserted monastery that was once accessible from Khlong Dusit. There are the remains of a sermon hall and some chedi still on site. The former temple remains mostly unexcavated, and there is an abundance of red brick scattered around. Squatters have built shacks on top of the formerly consecrated ground. A modern shrine has been constructed on site to commemorate Wat Dusit.

- ❖ *Continue going north until you arrive at the surprisingly large chedi in the middle of Rochanna Road. This site can be seen at a great distance away and is impossible to overlook.*

Chedi Wat Sam Plum is located dead-center in the middle of the Rojana Road -- as it leads to/from the Asian Highway. Wat Sam Plum serves as a traffic roundabout, and it is well-known welcoming sign to the old city. Its large chedi is usually decorated and lit up at night. The style of the chedi suggests that it was constructed in the middle-Ayutthaya period. However, it should be pointed out that, King Borommakot (r. 1733-1758) renovated many monasteries in this area during his reign, so it is possible that Wat Sam Plum may have contributed to renovation as well.

- ❖ *You must cross the busy street to continue bicycling north of this roundabout chedi. However, there are two options for accomplishing this daunting task. If you are confident that your biking skills could survive the chaotic traffic and dangers ahead, simply circle around the roundabout in synch with motor vehicles until you can continue on the road north ahead.*
- ❖ *The second option is turn left, eventually hopping your bike onto the sidewalk. It is possible, to bypass all this traffic by going under the bridge (beside Khlong Dusit). In this case, you will take a small path that runs parallel to the bridge. It will lead to another small path on the opposite side of the road. Head back toward the roundabout chedi and turn left on the northern road.*

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- ❖ *Whatever option selected, go north until arriving at the first road on your left (after crossing the bridge over Khlong Ban Bat. You will see a large pond on the left hand side of the road. Take a left turn and head toward the train station. This street will have some natural turns and plenty of speed bumps, but the train station and final reference point will be in view before long.*

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.

- ❖ *Final Step: After crossing the train tracks, 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 turn left at the first road you come past. This returns you to the starting point.*
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