

AYUTTHAYA HISTORICAL RESEARCH [AHR]

Ayutthaya Western Bicycle Track

History of Ayutthaya
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2010

AYUTTHAYA - WESTERN BICYCLE TRACK (The Thung Prachet and Pak Kran Loop)

This bicycle tour has been designed for the exploration of some of the most important historical sites along the western rim of Ayutthaya (just off the main city island). Many ruins in this western section are historically linked to warfare against the Burmese, and some of them distinctively mark sites of important battle. This off-the-beaten-track route will lead you to many magnificent ruins and some seldom seen by tourists.

These western Ayutthaya neighborhoods are bordered in the north by the Chao Phraya River and in the east by Khlong Takhian - called “Canal du Grand Cochon” by early French visitors. Highway #3060 loosely frames its western boundary. Geographically, the nearly defunct Khlong Klaeb, running north of Wat Chai Wathanaram, more or less indicates the border between two important fields – Thung Prachet and Thung Pak Kran. The Thung Prachet field is in the north, and the Thung Pak Kran field is in the south.

This section of the city was the least populated area during the Ayutthayan period. One reason for this may be the local belief that the West is considered inauspicious and represents death, impurity and the setting sun. Ghosts are said to gravitate toward the west, and a number of the sites on this route are still considered haunted by locals. Burma caused much destruction in this area during numerous military invasions of the past. Therefore, it is perhaps appropriate to associate the west side of Ayutthaya with death, ghosts, and war atrocities. Much of this land in the west is still undeveloped. Rice fields, small forests, and jungles of wild vegetation are typical views. Nevertheless, a modern population has grown here during recent times. There are now large Buddhist and Muslim communities especially along the Chao Phraya River.

The tour will take 4 to 5 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.

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 hazardous 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 and occasional recklessness of motor traffic.

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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 keep valuables with you when visiting the historic sites 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>

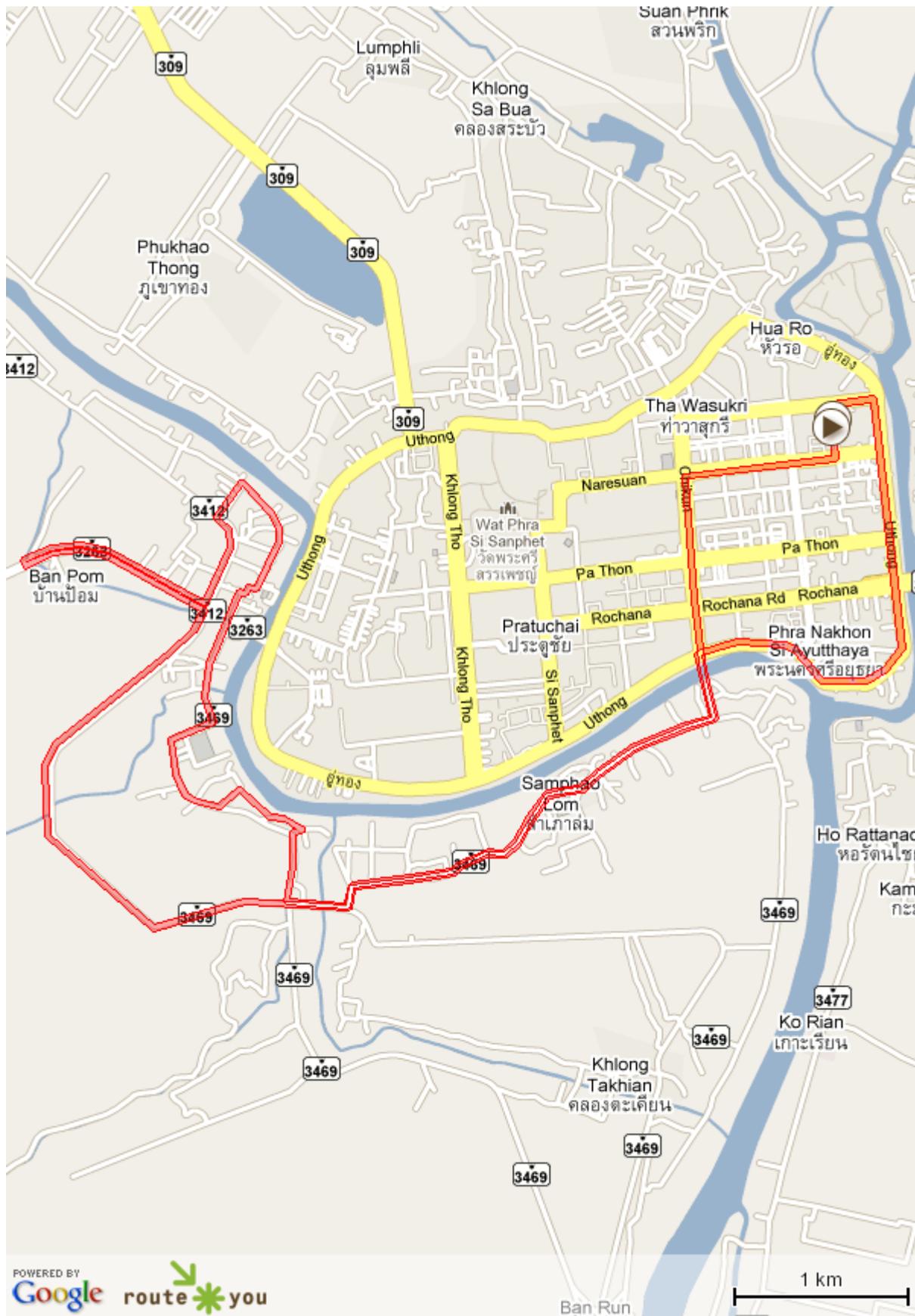
In emergency or accident:

Contact the Ayutthaya Tourist Police Station: (035) 241-446, (035) 242-352 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, go south toward Chao Phrom Market and turn right (you will have to walk your bike to the opposite side of the road). Head west along Naresuan Road until you arrive at Chikun Road. You will see two memorial chedi and the ruins of a bricked bridge (Saphan Pa Than) in the middle of the road. This is the gateway to the Ayutthaya Historic Park. Do not enter the park; turn left on Chikun Road instead and continue south. You will pass a roundabout and the leftover ruin of a bridge (Saphan Chikun). Keep going forward until you come to the end of the road. This is the location of a ferry boat that provides services to the opposite side of the Chao Phraya River. Bicycles and motorcycles can use this ferry for only a few baht. The first reference point is on the opposite side of the river.

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 to the main road from Wat Khun Phrom and turn right. This street does not have a name listed on road signs, but it is roughly considered part of Highway 3469. You will bike in the direction west for a few minutes before arriving at a Muslim shrine on the left-hand side of the road. This site is situated on the corner of a fork in the road. Keep going forward in the direction west.*

The Tomb of the 4th Chula Rachamontri named "Chen" is located on an ancient Muslim graveyard called Chao Kun Khu Cham. The cemetery is situated on the west bank of the Khu Cham canal in an area largely populated by Muslims. Chen, a Persian Muslim, was the Phraya Chula Rachamontri in the reign of King Suriyamarin (r. 1758-1767). He was the last Chula Rachamontri of the Ayutthayan era. Chen's family home stood at the mouth of the Khu Cham canal. Chen obtained first the rank of Phraya Wichit Narong and was later promoted to Phraya Chula Rachamontri. Chen was also given charge of the Royal Treasury, but apparently not given the title of Chao Phraya Phra Khlang, which usually came with this position. The Chula Rachamontri controlled from the 17th century onwards the Department of Western Maritime Affairs known in Siam as the Krom Tha Khwa.

- ❖ *Continue to head west for 5-10 minutes until you arrive at a fork on the road. This will briefly curve left in the direction south, then immediately lead to a second fork in the road. It is important to take the next right hand turn and head west. Go over the bridge! This will take you over Khlong Takhian, and you will officially have touched ground for the first time on the western section of the city – the area emphasized with this bike route.*

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- ❖ *Continue biking west. You will shortly come to another intersection. Keep going forward in the direction west. This part of the bike route will lead you through a long rural stretch of natural scenery including rice fields and small jungles of wild vegetation. The road will gradually curve northward, and you might catch glimpses of a small canal. Keep your eyes open for a large bell shaped chedi on your left hand side. This little known ruin can be seen at a great distance away. It is considered by many locals to be the most haunted with plenty of nighttime activity by ghosts. It is worth checking out as the first official Point of Interest on this bike trek. Note: It is easier to access the site by using the small dirt road situated near to where the road bends. A small house marks the spot.*

Wat Krachai is located in the middle of several rice fields, where seasonal flooding is commonplace. The ruin has remained highly isolated. However, a new dirt road has recently been constructed. Wat Krachai is a considerably large ruin with a number of structures in situ. Its most outstanding feature is a large bell-shaped chedi in the middle-Ayutthaya period style. This chedi has been heavily looted over the years, and many large holes have been unfortunately burrowed deep into the chedi's surface - thus, weakening the structure. There is a large hollow chamber inside the chedi that can be entered. In addition, this ruin has traces of a large sermon hall, boundary walls, and portions of Buddha images.

Wat Krachai was a site of military conflict. Royal chronicles refer to Nemiao, the general of the Burmese armies, leading conscripted men to establish stockades at the Monastery of the Krachai Plant in the final days of the Ayutthaya kingdom. Burmese troops then used large guns to fire upon the capital city from this site. Local folklore suggests that many soldiers and civilians were cremated at Wat Krachai after a series of battles leading to its being later haunting by ghosts.

- ❖ *Continue biking on the same road. It will start turning north and lead you through former battle sites in the Thung Pak Kran field, as well as some unexcavated temple sites (Wat Tao and Wat Ta Muk). The road will continue curving through scenic rice fields and undeveloped property. You will be able to spot a number of ruins on the horizon including Wat Chai Wathanaram, Wat Worachet, and even Wat Phukhao Thong. This road will eventually lead to an active temple on the right hand side of the road. It appears just before Highway 3263. Turn right for a quick look.*

Wat Lod Chong is an active temple with Buddhist monks. There is an ordination hall in situ, an open sided vihara with a seated Buddha statue, and other monastic structures. The ubosot was built in the Early Ayutthaya style (1351-1491), but its construction dates to the Ratanakosin period (after 1851 AD). The ordination hall is surrounded by eight "bai sema" or boundary stones, placed in the cardinal and inter-cardinal directions and protected from the elements by small open-sided structures. The boundary stones are double, indicating former royal patronage. The complex is surrounded by an inner wall or crystal wall (Th: Kamphaeng Kaew) demarcating the sacred area. Near Wat Lod Chong was one of the four former ferry crossings across the Chao Phraya River, linking the monastery to the Rear Palace (Wang Lang).

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- ❖ *Return to the road that you were previously biking on. Continue ahead for a minute or two and you will arrive at Highway 3263. Turn left (in the opposite direction of the bridge) and continue west on the busy road for about 5 minutes. You will pass a bike shop and antique dealership that may be worth a look. The highway will gradually turn toward an intersection with Highway 3060. The next Point of Interest is a large ruin with an active temple on the left hand side of the road. At this point, you will have crossed over to the Thung Prachet field.*

Wat Worachet is often confused with a monastery sharing a similar name that is located directly on the city island. Wat Worachet can still be classified as a restored ruin; however, an active sermon hall, monks' quarters, and a shrine to King Naresuan were constructed in 2009. Most of this modern-half is located away from the ruin and separated by trees and a small creek. The ancient monastery has many impressive structures, which have been restored by the Fine Arts Department. The primary structure is its large Khmer-style prang. The reappearance of the Khmer-style prang is often accredited to King Prasat Thong, who was sparked by the end of a Buddhist millennial year.

Royal Chronicles mention Wat Worachet as early as 1663-1564. The army of the Phraya of Bassein erected a stockade in the vicinity during an invasion by Burmese troops. Wat Worachet is also a likely site of the infamous Picnic Incident in which two Dutch traders were nearly executed. It is also believed by some scholars that King Naresuan's ashes were interned at this temple after an elaborate ceremony involving monks of the forest sect.

- ❖ *The next step may be a bit dangerous, but it is unavoidable that the highway be crossed. Cross over to the other side of Highway 3263 as cautiously as possible as traffic can move quite fast at times. When you have reached the opposite side, start biking east in the opposite direction as Wat Worachet. You will come to a road on your left hand side shortly before coming to the bridge leading to the main city island. Turn left and start biking north. However, this street can also be busy during weekends, so we recommend that you take the dirt road that runs parallel to it instead. The dirt road and the paved road are separated by a cement canal, so it is easy to tell the correct route.*
- ❖ *Take the dirt road north until you come to a small bridge. At this point, the road will start bending northwest. Look for a side road that is marked by large statues of crows. These birds signify the path to Wat Tha Ka Rong. Go over the bridge and turn down this side road. It will lead you east toward the Chao Phraya River. The next Point of Interest is situated beside the river.*

Wat Tha Ka Rong or the "Monastery of the Landing of the Crying Crow" is an active temple with Buddhist clergy. It has recently become a hot spot due to a water market held on its premises during weekends. It is also popular oddly because of its impressive bathrooms. This monastery was initially named Wat Tha as it was situated on a landing of the Chao Phraya River. The dockyard provided shelter for approximately two hundred boats. To its south was Wat Ka Rong (and a small viharn still exists). The names of the two monasteries were merged

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under this new name. The Chronicles of Ayutthaya mention the temple's existence for the first time in the mid-sixteenth century, but the monastery has been likely established much earlier. It has been the site of major military battles, including the final conflict with Burmese troops in 1767.

- ❖ *Take the south-side exit from Wat Tha Ka Rong. This small rode parallels the Chao Phraya River, and it will lead you directly to the next 2-3 sites along the way. The first Reference Point will appear in only a minute or two. You can't miss it because the road literally splits the active monastery into two separate parts. Some bikers will find Wat Thammaram worth an extended stop.*

Wat Thammaram, was earlier called Wat Thamma, or the Monastery of the Dhamma (the teachings of the Buddha). It is located along the west bank of the Chao Phraya River. In situ are several monastic structures of recent times, although the foundations of more ancient structures are still visible. Remains of the old outer wall and the lower part of the old gates can still be seen.

Royal Chronicles mention this site in 1569, while the city was under siege by Burmese troops. Phraya Thamma had set up his stockade to defend the west side of the City against the Burmese; an important strategic position across from Sop Sawan Monastery and near to the Rear Palace. The Burmese hatched a secretive plan to send a spy, Phraya Chakri, behind city walls to manipulate Siamese leaders on the other side. As part of a plot to trick Ayutthaya troops, the Burmese king ordered that 30 Burmese, Mon, and Laotian guards be executed by impalement in front of the stockade; claiming that this punishment for deserved for allowing Phraya Chakri to escape.

- ❖ *Continue south on the same road. Immediately after Wat Thammaram, on the right hand side of the road, there is a small ruin hidden in someone's yard. It is easy to miss if you don't have a sharp eye.*

Wat Pa Sao is a small ruin situated close to the Chao Phraya River on the west side of the city. It is located on residential property and may be difficult to find. It consists of a single chedi that has been toppled over. Its spire can be seen broken into several parts on the ground. There isn't much remaining of this former monastery, but it serves as an example of how a great number of city ruins still remain concealed from public view.

- ❖ *The next Point of Interest is directly next to Wat Pha Sao and only slightly south of Wat Thammaram. It is a large, active, monastery beside the Chao Phraya River.*

Wat Kasatrathirat is a monastery still in use by the Buddhist clergy. Besides the ordination hall and the relatively small prang, most of the monastic buildings are from recent times. Although the history of this temple remains hazy, it is presumed to be built in the mid-to-late Ayutthaya period. The principal monastic structure is a large Khmer-style prang, which has recently been painted white. There are no stairs to access the various niches inside the prang.

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Traces of restoration include the bell-shaped chedis inside the niches, which earlier contained Buddha images. The temple was renovated in the first reign of the Ratanakosin Period (1782-1809) by Prince Khrom Khun Isranurak, a nephew of King Rama I. The renovation was in essence a complete overhaul of the temple. The temple at that time changed names from Wat Kasatra to Wat Kasatrathirat.

- ❖ *Continue biking south until you reach Highway 3263 once again. Turn left and head toward the bridge. However, go underneath the bridge instead of crossing it. There is a small side road on the left that will lead you safely under and around the bridge to the opposite side of Highway 3263. You will then take the first left hand turn and continue in the direction south. (a 7-11 convenience store will be near the corner). This new road parallels the Chao Phraya River.*
- ❖ *You will soon pass the front side of Wat Lod Chong, which you have already seen from its rear entrance. Stay with the natural flow of the road and it will lead you to one of the grandest sites in the city - Wat Chai Wathanaram. If you are really alert you might also see on route the ruins of an ancient “love sack” used by King Prasat Thong during the construction of this temple.*

Wat Chai Wathanaram was built in the 1630 by King Prasat Thong, who believed that the Khmer-style prang would reflect Ayutthaya's historical magnificence at the end of a Buddhist millennial year. This temple is unique as it has the only fully symmetrical architectural design in the city. One theory is that Wat Chai Wathanaram was built on the spot of King Prasat Thong's former home, and that it was constructed to make merit for his mother – or possibly his stepmother. Popular folklore suggests King Prasat Thong had a childhood dream in which a golden tower was buried inside an anthill at this location. When the anthill was later excavated it proved his dream a prophetic revelation. Another theory is that Buddhist monks predicted the annihilation of Ayutthaya at the end of the Buddhist millennial year unless enough merit had been accumulated, so King Prasat Thong launched a massive campaign to build and renovate temples across the city. Whatever the reason, the return of the Khmer-style Prang marked a new era of architecture in Ayutthaya.

Like other temples in the west, Wat Chai Wathanaram ultimately felt the brunt of war. The Burmese besieged this monastery in 1767 and used it as an army camp while staging attacks on the main island. Excavations revealed evidence of damage by cannon balls. After 1767, Wat Chai Wathanaram was abandoned and looted for decades afterward. The Fine Arts Department renovated Wat Chai Wathanaram between 1987 and 1992. It remains one of the most breathtaking tourist sites today.

- ❖ *Continue on the main road. Make the next left hand turn to the next Point of Interest. Wat Sanam Chai is adjacent to Wat Chai Wathanaram on its eastern side.*

Wat Sanam Chai is an active temple located beside the Chao Phraya River in close proximity to Wat Chai Wathanaram. A number of ceramic plates from China decorate the front entrance of its sermon hall. According to monks at this temple, these plates originated

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from the late-Ayutthaya period, but were incorporated into the temple's design in modern times. Some portions of the temple's outer walls still exist. However, the most significant structure in site is an old memorial chedi reflecting the Burmese-Mon style. This was built in the Mid-Ayutthaya period for Burmese soldiers that had died in battle. In the latter years of the Ayutthaya Kingdom, a monastery was founded on the site.

- ❖ *Go back to the main road and continue in the eastern direction. You will arrive at an active temple beside Khlong Takhian and the Chao Phraya River. In front of the temple's entrance are two distinctive Yaksa guarding the entrance gate.*

Wat Klang Khlong Takhian is situated at the confluence of the Chao Phraya River and Khlong Takhian. There are all the standard monastic structures providing services by Buddhist clergy. The ordination hall was built in the Late Ayutthaya style (1629-1767). Some of the current attractions include a large piece of Takhian wood that is believed to have a female ghost residing in it. There is also a merry-go-round structure that involves replications of Buddhist monks proceeding in a circle with begging bowls in hand for alms giving.

- ❖ *The next reference point is a ruin located directly across from the exit of previous site. It can be spotted on the right-hand side of the road.*

Wat Klang is an ancient monastery lying adjacent to the active temple Wat Klang Khlong Takhian. In situ is a brick mound with a damaged Buddhist image. Near Wat Klang was a ferry crossing across the Chao Phraya River, linking the monasteries with Tha Wang Chai. The marine vessel dockyard was situated near the mouth of Khlong Takhian and housed 30 marine warships and over 100 smaller fighting vessels under the supervision of the Phraya Rachawangsan.

- ❖ *Return route: Continue on the same road. It will bypass a school with several astrological symbols at its gate - rabbits, tigers, oxen, snakes, etc. Shortly afterward, you will arrive at an intersection leading to a bridge. This will link you back to Bike Route #6. Once you have crossed over the bridge, you will have finished with the official Western loop. Bike east from this point onward.*
- ❖ *Continue heading east on the same road. This will lead you near an old Christian church that is still active and partially viewable from the road. To see it, you will have to turn left and go down a small side road -- towards the Chao Phraya River. However, on this particular route, this site serves only as a reference point for an upcoming turn in the road.*

St. Joseph's Church is situated on the south bank of the Chao Phraya River beside Khlong Takhian. In 1665, the Siamese King granted the French bishops a spot near the Chao Phraya River in the Cochin Chinese quarter called "Ban Pla Het". In 1665-1666 they built the Seminary of Saint Joseph, later renamed the "Seminary of the Holy Angels". Between 1685 and 1695 the original wooden church was rebuilt in bricks in European style. In March 1767

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the Portuguese settlement and the St Joseph seminary were isolated and surrounded by attacking Burmese. 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 were burned down, and the fire spread to the church and seminary, which were both reduced to ashes. In 1831 Father Jean-Baptist Pallegoix began restoration of the church, which was completed in 1847.

- ❖ *Continue going east for a few more minutes. On the left hand side of the road, you will be able to see a large white prang (khmer-style chedi) from a distance away. This is the next reference point. Many cyclists may enjoy a stop at this active temple, but it is not listed as a Point of Interest on this particular route.*

Wat Phuttaisawan faces east and is bordered on the north by the Chao Phraya River. 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 them back under the control of Ayutthaya in 1352. The monastery was one of the first temples constructed in the Ayutthaya kingdom. This area has been regularly part of a war theatre. The Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya mention that the army of the King of Ava invading Ayutthaya in 1549 and setting up a stockade in this area.

- ❖ *Continue biking east from Wat Phuttaisawan. You will bypass Chao Kun Khu Cham Cemetery, which you have already seen earlier, only this time it will be on the right hand side of the road. Keep back tracking east until you arrive at the turn off for Wat Khun Phrom. This is the location of the ferry boat that you have already used.*
- ❖ *The ferry boat will deliver you to the opposite side of the Chao Phraya River, back on the main island. The best return route is to turn right on U-Thong Road and continue east. This route will bypass Pom Phet, which will be situated on the right hand side of the road.*

Pom Phet or the Diamond Fortress was one of the sixteen fortresses along the city walls of Ayutthaya. Situated in the southeast, at the confluence of the Pa Sak River and the Chao Phraya River in Bang Kaja area and on the east bank of the Nai Kai canal, Pom Phet was the most important fortress, protecting the harbour where foreign ships were forced to anchor for inspection and unloading. No foreign ships travelling up the Chao Phraya River before were allowed beyond this point. Pom Phet is the one of the two remnants of old fortresses and now a public park. The site has been recently renovated, since serious damage occurred from water erosion to the river banks.

- ❖ *Keep heading east along U-Thong Road. It will shortly turn past an active temple named Wat Ratanachai, or Wat Jin, on your right hand side. On the opposite side of the road, to your left, you will see a small side road for entering Wat Suwan Dararam.*

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Wat Ratanachai is more commonly known under the name of Wat Jin today, because many Teochiu Chinese migrated to this part of the city in the latest century. As an active monastery, Wat Ratanachai has all the basic architecture structures of a Buddhist temple: sermon hall, bell tower, monk quarters, crematory furnace, and a number of chedi. Nearly all of these architectural structures date to the Ratanakosin period. The highlight of this monastery is its central bell shaped chedi, which has been painted white. A well-preserved pointed vault gate (Pratu Chong Kud) can be seen next to Wat Ratanachai. To visit it, you must enter the school west of this temple.

- ❖ *U-Thong road will turn with the natural contours of the island and go north, parallel to the Pa Sak River. You will pass underneath the Pridi Banomyong Bridge and see traces of old city walls to your right. Continue to Chao Phrom Market and go one block past it. Make a left onto Pa Maprao Road; then take the first road on your left. This will return you to the starting point.*
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