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Kamphaeng Phet

Set astride the wide Ping River and framed by forested mountains in the west, the provincial capital of Kamphaeng Phet is best known for a small but worthwhile historical park. Hang around and you’ll find a fun riverfront with several good markets, spirited locals and very few tourists.

Kamphaeng Phet, a name that means Diamond Wall, was a key defensive stronghold for the Sukhothai kingdom from the 13th to 15th centuries and remained relevant when it came under the sway of Ayutthaya. “A battlefield on many occasions” according to the excellent National Museum, the city was flattened during the Burma-Siam war of the 1760s. Pieces of original earthen walls still stand around the old city as testaments to its medieval military might.

At Wat Phra Kaeo.

While readiness for warfare was paramount, Kamphaeng Phet was also an important commercial and religious arm of Sukhothai. It’s believed that Phra Kaew -- the Emerald Buddha now enshrined in Bangkok as Thailand’s most sacred Buddha image -- was temporarily placed at Kamphaeng Phet’s own Wat Phra Kaeo before flying off to Chiang Rai in 1434.

The remains of several ancient monasteries and monuments are now part of Kamphaeng Phet Historical Park, a UNESCO world heritage site as of 1991. The ruins display a mix of Ayutthaya-period art adorning older architecture from the Sukhothai period, and this makes
them unique when compared to the related ruins found at Sukhothai and Si Satchanalai. We feel that Kamphaeng Phet Historical Park is the least impressive of the three, but it’s no slouch either.

And Kamphaeng Phet is much more than just a clump of ruins. Along a riverfront that’s invigorating and relaxing in equal measure, some of the locals play basketball or tennis while others settle into funky bars to kick back with some live music. Most hit the night market to grab a grilled fish or flowers for a sweetheart. If we could pick only one city to get a feel for the laidback lifestyle of Thailand’s lower north, Kamphaeng Phet would be it.

Further afield, Khlong Lan National Park boasts a spectacular waterfall in the mountains of western Kamphaeng Phet province, while Mae Wong National Park is a favourite of campers and wildlife photographers. You could also go for a soak at the Phra Ruang hot springs, located 13 kilometres north of Kamphaeng Phet town, or head south towards the Nakhon Sawan border to see hundreds of monkeys hanging around a limestone massif known as Khao Kor.

Few travellers make a stop in Kamphaeng Phet and many of those who do come on a day trip from Sukhothai, often as part of a tour. That’s a shame, as the city is located along a major bus route between Bangkok and Chiang Mai and getting here couldn’t be much easier. While a day is more than enough for the historical park, we suggest hanging around for a night or three at one of our favourite guesthouses in Thailand: Three J.
Orientation
Kamphaeng Phet town is loosely divided into two sections, both on the east side of the Ping River. To the south stretches the modern part of town, while the historical park is located to the north within the old city walls. The two main north-to-south thoroughfares that link the two areas are Tesa and Ratchadamnoen. Road signs are clearly posted in English and walking or cycling is a pleasure.

Contemplation at Wat Phra Borommathat.

The bus station is located two kilometres west of the river off Highway 101, not far from Highway 1 (or Asia Highway), a major inter-provincial road that links Bangkok to Chiang Mai. Head east over the bridge and you'll hit a large clock tower at a roundabout where 101 meets Tesa Road. This is the central point between the old and new parts of town: Tesa Road is referred to as Tesa 2 from here northwards and Tesa 1 from here south, and Ratchadamnoen follows suit. The front gates of the historical park's central zone are a short bike ride north of the roundabout.

Flanking the east bank of the river south from 101, Sirijit Road has scenic tree-lined steps and benches overlooking the river on one side, and a string of parks on the other. The night market is located towards the south of town, just south of Sirichit Park, between Sirijit and Tesa 1 and a stone's throw from Chakungrao and Navarat hotels. Much of the best food and nightlife can be found in this area.

Great eating at the night market.

The town's two main west-to-east thoroughfares, Charoensuk and Bumrungrat, shoot straight
east from Sirichit Park and serve as a commercial centre. Bumrungrat is home to a Tesco Lotus shopping centre and a huge day market where throngs of locals and provincial songthaews converge each day.

Kamphaeng Phet Hospital is to the south of town off Ratchadamnoen, 1.5 kilometres south of the night market. The city police station is found a few hundred metres north of the roundabout on Tesa 2, across from Tesa 2 Soi 1 and directly south of the historical park's central zone. There's also a tourist police office at the bus station.

Banks and ATMs are scattered along the main roads. A couple of internet cafes -- D Sport and Fasai Online -- are located just northeast of the roundabout on Tesa 2. Alternately, TK Room Net is found on Ratchavitji Road north of Ratchavitji Soi 2 -- take the first left if heading west from Three J Guesthouse and look for it on the left.

Kamphaeng Phet does not have its own TAT office but there's no need for one, as Three J provides everything you could possibly want to know about the town, historical park and province.
About this guide

This Travelfish.org guide was researched in person, on the ground, by a Travelfish writer. Travelfish.org always pays its way. No freebies. No discounts. No exceptions.

Links are to other pages within the document, or to external websites, so you will need to have internet access enabled for the latter to work. If you’re accessing this on a tablet or iPhone, please note that the links do not work in Kindle Reader for Android and iPhone. They do work in other PDF readers though, such as iBooks.

We’ve made the text large to make the guide easier to read on portable devices, so if you’re planning on printing this off, please consider printing two pages per page (most printers allow this).

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Got an idea on how to improve this guide? See something that is incorrect or out of date? Please let us know by emailing stuartmcdonald@travelfish.org or sambrown@travelfish.org.

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All Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors, Mapbox.

Good travels,
Sam and Stuart
The above map is intended to give you the general lay of the land. Many individual listings in this guide each have their own map showing you where they are. Open this map in Apple or Google maps.
Accommodation

Kamphaeng Phet

Backpackers should look no further than Three J Guesthouse, while flashpackers have a couple of solid choices closer to the river. Several small Thai-style resorts, such as Grand View and Techno Resort, also offer rooms starting at around 300 baht on the west bank of the Ping, but these are only worth considering if you have a vehicle.

THREE J GUESTHOUSE

Everything a backpacker needs
79 Ratchvitji Rd, Kamphaeng Phet
T: (055) 713 129 F: (055) 713 129;(081) 887 4189
threejguest@hotmail.com
http://www.threejguesthouse.com/
Under 600B (Backpacker )
Check online rates: [ Agoda ] [ Booking ]

Three J Guesthouse combines a homely atmosphere with eclectic decor and top-notch hospitality. Throw in volumes of info on exploring the area and comfortable rooms at budget prices, and you’ve got one of our all-time favourite places to stay in Thailand.

The 12 rooms share a property with the family home of Mr Charin, who speaks excellent English and does a wonderful job of making guests feel at home. In recent years he’s begun travelling more himself, often leaving the guesthouse in the trusted hands of his son, James, who is equally friendly and also speaks very good English.

Set in a few attached buildings with logs and stone for outer walls, the rooms are small but charming, well kept and solid for the prices. Queen beds are outfitted with comfy topper cushions, soft linens and locally made quilts. Wall-mounted fans are provided in addition to air-con, which gets switched off if you opt for the fan rates. Hot-water heaters work well in wet bathrooms with Western-style flush toilets. Photos of local attractions and duck pond designs adorn the walls. A couple of larger freestanding bungalows are great options for families on a budget. Most rooms come with private tables placed out front.
You can also grab a seat on a sofa in a large shared living room or one of several semi-private tables in a central garden area with lots of orchids and palms. Guests are welcome to use the fridge and dishes in a fully equipped kitchen set next to a common room with long wooden tables, where hearty Western breakfasts are served. Befriending other guests is easy here.

Mr Charin offers countless maps along with more than enough info to make your stay in Kamphaeng Phet as stress-free as possible. WiFi is free and fast, and several bicycles and motorbikes are available for rent. Mr Charin also runs Three J Travel, offering day tours to Khlong Lan Waterfall and other attractions in Kamphaeng Phet province and beyond.

On top of all that Mr Charin operates Khlong Mod Daeng Garden, a package programme that takes you into the mountains for hiking, swimming at waterfalls and a visit to a traditional Pakakayor (a sub-group of the Karen) village to learn silk weaving. It costs a reasonable 2,500 baht per person and includes accommodation, food and transport in the Three J Jeep.

The one slight disadvantage of Three J is a location that puts you towards the east side of town down a side road. From here it’s a manageable one-kilometre walk to the night market and riverfront, and a three-kilometre bike ride to the historical park. We feel that the guesthouse is absolutely worth the walk, but those who must stay closer to the river could opt for a room in the 300 to 500 baht range at the very basic Ko Chokchai Hotel, marked by a blue sign with only Thai script on Ratchadamnoen 1 Soi 8.
While Kamphaeng Phet doesn't draw many travellers, most of those who do visit stay at Three J. It should be fine to walk in for most of the year but we suggest calling ahead during peak season, from mid-December to February. Pick up at the bus station can be arranged with some notice.

**Room rates**
- Sgl fan share b'room: 250 baht
- Dbl fan private b'room: 300 baht - Plus 50 baht for TV
- Dbl air-con private b'room: 400 baht - Plus 50 baht for TV
- Bungalow air-con private b'room: 600 baht
- Family room: 800 baht

Click here or on the map above to see the location in Apple or Google maps.

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**Navarat Heritage Hotel**

*Cushy flashpacker digs*

2 Tesa 1 Soi 21, Kamphaeng Phet  
T: (055) 711 211 F: (055) 711 961  
info@navarathheritage.com  
http://www.navaratheritage.com

600B to 1,500B (Flashpacker )  
Check online rates: [Agoda][Booking]

In 2012 the Navarat added Heritage to its name while undergoing a dramatic renovation that rendered it the most stylish hotel in Kamphaeng Phet. The hotel boasts sparkling tile floors, tasteful hardwood walls in what has become quite a classy lobby with some shared computers, a lovely outdoor dining area, a full bar/restaurant, a fitness room and bicycles for rent. While the rooms are plainly decorated and not exactly cosy, they were outfitted with fresh carpet or tile floors to go with new furniture and appliances. Each are very spacious and equipped with air-con, TV, minibar, desk, safe, WiFi and modern bathroom. Some rooms on the higher floors have partial river views. There's not much to differentiate standards from superiors, but the triple is a good choice for families.
Navarat has a good location -- a stone's throw from the river and night market -- but like most of the city's hotels it's a few kilometres from the historical park. Staff is friendly but limited English is spoken. For a better view and inferior rooms that fetch roughly the same rates, the nearby Chakungrao Riverside Hotel is another large hotel in this same vicinity.

**Room rates**

*Standard - Double: 1,100 baht - 1,400 baht for a triple*

*Superior - Double: 1,400 baht*

Click here or on the map above to see the location in Apple or Google maps.

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**SCENIC RIVERSIDE RESORT**

*A riverside option*

356/16 Tesa 2 Rd, Kamphaeng Phet

*T:* (055) 722 009 *F:* (055) 722 109

*info@scenicriversideresort.com*

*http://www.scenicriversideresort.com*

1,500B to 4,000B (Midrange )

Check online rates: [Agoda](#) [Booking](#)

Located beside the river and just south of the historical park, the small Scenic Riverside Resort possesses a lot more character than the bland name suggests.

Most rooms are in the form of white Grecian-style concrete structures and each is a little different from the next. The cheapest Luzern and Amsterdam categories come with loads of space, several windows, high ceilings, polished concrete floors and cushioned benches that run along the walls. The pricier rooms are massive and have one to two bedrooms plus separate living areas.
Interesting touches include king beds on round wooden platforms, faux fireplaces and stained glass windows in enormous bathrooms -- though the cutesy teddy bears and dolls are a bit over the top. All rooms are kitted out with air-con, TVs with karaoke options, fridges, WiFi, bathtubs and rooftop terraces with grills for a do-it-yourself barbecue. Facilities include a swimming pool, bicycle rental and a restaurant where included breakfasts are served.

The resort seems aimed at holidaying Thai families, but staff speaks a little English and all are welcome. The location on the north side of town puts you within a kilometre of the historical park and a few kilometres from the night market. It’s very quiet down this way. Rates jump by 250 baht on weekends, listed below under “High.”

**Room rates**

*Standard - Double:* 1,250 baht (low season) 1,500 baht (high season)
*Deluxe- Double:* 2,250 baht (low season) 2,500 baht (high season)
*Family room:* 3,250 baht (low season) 3,500 baht (high season)
Eat and meet

Kamphaeng Phet

Kamphaeng Phet has a great night market to go with a solid selection of restaurants and a happening nightlife scene.

The riverside **night market** sets up from 17:00 in a semi-roofed area and draws hundreds of locals. Outer stalls mostly feature clothing and fresh fruit, including the stumpy bananas and durian that Kamphaeng Phet is known for. Wander further inside to find Thai curries and chilli pastes, deep-fried larva, coconut sticky rice and other Thai sweets, northern and northeastern Thai sausages, deep-fried pork belly, noodle soup and fiery Isaan salads. Several stalls have a few tables for eating on site, or you could walk towards the parking lot to find a few larger restaurants serving whole grilled fish along with stir-fried veggies and soups. Also keep an eye out for *chao kuai*, black strips of sweet grass jelly served over ice with sugar syrup and toppings like jackfruit, dried pineapple and banana. Follow that with a cocktail from a pink VW bus bar and you’ll be under Kamphaeng Phet's spell.

For a great day market experience, head to the **Municipal Market** that sets up just off Bumrungrat Road, across the street from Bumrungrat Soi 1. The sprawling affair feels like the centre of Kamphaeng Phet's universe and is a great place to pick up *khao niao bing* (coconut sticky rice grilled in banana leaves) and other munchables while perusing the locally grown produce.

Though you’ll find *ba-mii muu daeng* all over Thailand, Kamphaeng Phet is particularly known for this Chinese-Thai dish featuring egg-wheat noodles with roasted pork, served dry (*heng*) or as a soup with a pork broth (*sai nam*). A good place to try it is **Ba-mii Chakungrao**, a hole-in-the-wall shop near the river that serves small bowls for 30 baht a piece. Pork satay is also available. Ba-mii can also be found in the night market with roasted duck as well as pork.

After dark, locals converge at one of the many **muu kata (do-it-yourself pork barbecue) joints** scattered around town. These can seem intimidating at first but are actually pretty simple: collect your desired pork and veggies from the central buffet and use chopsticks or tongs to cook it yourself at the round grill with a riveted edge for boiling, which is provided at the centre of each table. It’s best enjoyed with cold beer and a few friends, and for 159 baht per person you can eat as much as you like. A huge muu kata joint called **Ped Muu Kata**
gets packed every night just down the road from Three J.
Vegetarians can hit a tiny ahaan jay (vegan food) shop serving Chinese-Thai curries, stir-fries and meat substitutes at a tiny shop on Ratchadamnoen 1, just north of Soi 2 on the right if heading north -- look for the yellow banner and sign that says “Vegetarian and Healthy Food”. It’s open only during the day and is easy to miss, with a few tables on the ground floor of a shophouse. Several other open-fronted shops serve boat noodles, Isaan food, noodle soup and khao man gai (chicken rice) along Ratchadamnoen Road.

Down the road from the night market, Tasty Restaurant is a good choice if you prefer an English menu with pictures, servers who can speak a little English and a comfortable air-con atmosphere. Here we tried khao ob hom din, a tasty mix of pork, sausage, veggies and rice baked and served in a clay pot. The khao soi (Northern Thai curry chicken soup with egg noodles) and whole deep-fried fish with som tam also looked promising. You’ll also find spaghetti, steaks, salmon salad with cream cheese and salty Thai-style drinking food that goes great with cold beer. Prices run from 40 to 200 baht.

You could also head across the bridge to the west bank of the Ping River, where at least half a dozen large restaurants serve Thai-style seafood at open-sided dining decks set up along the river. We’ve heard good things about Mae Ping Riverside, which has live music to go with dishes starting at around 100 baht. To get here, take the first exit after crossing the bridge and then hang a right (south), and look for the Thai script signs on the left after a few hundred metres.
Back at the night market.

If you’re craving a Western-style sandwich, head straight to **Fat Boys Burger and Bite** on Ratchadamnoen 1 Soi 4. While beef is not available, the little shop does a good job with grilled chicken “burgers” along with commendable stabs at barbecued ribs, steaks and pasta for just 40 to 100 baht.

Kamphaeng Phet also boasts a bunch of good **bakeries and coffee shops**. A standout is **Phayao** (the only English on the sign says "Real Coffee"), a long-running spot near the night market on Tesa 1 that serves up whole cakes, ice cream, Western-style baked goods, steamed Chinese buns (sala bao) and dim sum. A good place to start the day is **Chai Bakery** around the corner from the Navarat Hotel on Ratchadamnoen 1. Strong Northern Thai coffee and a range of baked goods are served in a smart, air-con space -- a small piece of their tasty sponge cake kept us full until early afternoon. While we didn’t have time to try it on our last visit, the newish **Common Cafe** near Tasty on Tesa 1 appeared to be an interesting option for dinner, coffee and cocktails.

Must leave the night market...

The riverfront area near the night market and Chakungrao Hotel is the place to be for **nightlife**. Funky little bars like the long-running **Eagle Pub** on Tesa 1, **Wanwaan** on Ratchadamnoen 1 Soi 2 and **Rong Team Sa Kung Rao** on Tesa 1 Soi 9 all feature live music to go with beer towers, bottles of whiskey and cocktails served in cozy confines. The open-air pub next to the riverfront basketball court has had a different name every time we’ve visited; in mid 2016 it went by **Studio Cafe** and was thumping hip-hop.
Ba-mii Chakungrao: Corner of Ratchadamnoen 1 Rd and Ratchadamnoen 1 Soi 1 (look for a green sign in Thai with a picture of a bowl of noodles with chopsticks); open daily 08:30-15:00.
Chai Bakery: Ratchadamnoen 1 Rd, just south of the entrance to Navarat Heritage Hotel; open daily 08:30-20:30.
Day market: Bumrungrat Rd, across from Bumrungrat Soi 1; open daily early morning to afternoon.
Fat Boys Burger and Bite: Ratchadamnoen 1 Soi 4, just north of Ratchadamnoen Rd on the left if heading north; T: (095) 634 3221; open 08:30-21:00.
Night market: Tesa 1 Rd, just north of the Chakungrao Hotel; open daily 17:00-23:00.
Ped Muu Kata: Ratchvitji Rd, about 200m south of Three J Guesthouse; open 16:00 22:00.
Phayao Bakery: Tesa 1 Rd, just south of the night market; open 07:30-20:30.
Tasty Restaurant: Tesa 1 Rd, just south of Tesa 1 Soi 9; T: (055) 712 594; open daily 10:30-22:30.
Two days in Kamphaeng Phet

Soak it up
The UNESCO-listed ruins at Kamphaeng Phet attract a trickle of travellers, often on day trips from Sukhothai. Those who linger are treated to great food, a scenic riverfront, pristine natural attractions and locals who haven't become jaded by mainstream tourism. If you seek to sidestep the well-trodden track, two days in Kamphaeng Phet could be just the ticket.

A great reason to spend a night or two in Kamphaeng Phet is Three J Guesthouse, one of our favourite places to stay in Thailand. Mr Charin and his son James ease the difficulty of exploring a non-touristy destination by providing maps, info, tours and motorbike/bicycle rental while generally making guests feel welcome in a town where you won’t see many foreign faces.

Day one
Set off on a bicycle in the morning, stopping for a northern Thai coffee at one of several bakeries among the city’s solid selection of food offerings. Before you pedal up to the ruins, head down to the day market off Bumrangrat Road to see (and taste) fresh local fruit among the mounds of produce.

With a bundle of stumpy bananas in your bicycle basket, pedal north past quiet temples and the old wooden houses that line Tesa Road. Many homes double as restaurants, dishing out tasty egg-wheat noodle (ba-mii) soup with roasted duck or pork -- a specialty of Kamphaeng Phet. After a bowl (or three), continue north to the historical park’s central zone.
After checking out the Ayutthaya-period Buddha images and elephant sculptures at Wat Phra Kaeo, mosey over to the National Museum and Ruan Thai Museum to gain a deeper understanding of Kamphaeng Phet's place in history. If you're the superstitious type, offer a flower garland at a shrine dedicated to the Hindu god Shiva, believed to protect all those who pass through the area.

Pedal northwest from the museums and turn right and then left to the historical park’s northern zone, where temples like Wat Phra Non and Wat Phra Si Ariyabot feature worn laterite Buddha images that resemble the sculptures of Alberto Giacometti. Be sure to make it all the way to the 68 elephant sculptures at Wat Chang Rob before slowing down at some of the minor sites.

After giving your legs a well-deserved rest, your stomach will probably be ready for the night market. Choose from grilled northern Thai sausage, spicy curries, salads, chilli pastes, whole fishes, noodle soup and an array of Thai sweets and fruits. Some shops have a few tables, though you could also collect a bunch of items and bring them back to Three J for a feast, using dishes from the guesthouse’s shared kitchen.

Day two
Rise early, hop on a motorbike or in the Three J Jeep and cruise west to Khlong Lan National Park’s 100 metre-high waterfall. The waterfall boasts several streams cascading into a series of pools fit for sirens -- and backpackers. You could bask in the waterfall's beauty for hours,
but nature trails beckon visitors to venture deeper into the old growth.

*Khlong Lan doesn't mess around when it comes to waterfalls.*

As you leave Khlong Lan, you might stop at a nearby Karen village where traditional wears and foodstuffs can be purchased direct from people who have called these hills home for ages. To explore further into the remote mountains that stretch all the way to Burma, continue west to the solitary viewpoints and waterfalls of [Mae Wong National Park](https://www.travelfish.org/). Do be aware that you'll need more than a day to make the most of Mae Wong.

By the time you arrive back in Kamphaeng Phet the sun will probably hang low over the mountains from where you've just returned. Pass giggling children and open-fronted homes where the scent of family dinners wafts into the twilight as you stride to the riverfront. Relax in one of a few pleasant parks or kick back for a foot massage while watching the sun dip into the Ping River.

*Soak it up by Kamphaeng Phet's riverside.*

The night market may call you back for a second round, or you could stop by Tasty Restaurant for a mix of Thai and Western food in a comfy air-con setup. You could then keep the suds flowing while listening to a local band at one of several chilled out pubs found near the river. Don't worry, Kamphaeng Phet is a small and safe city -- you'll find your way back to Three J.

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**Kamphaeng Phet Historical Park: Central zone**

*Don’t miss the elephant statues*

_Centre and west of town._

**Daily 08:00 - 18:00**

Comprising Kamphaeng Phet Historical Park’s entire central zone, Wat Phra Kaeo and Wat Phra That stand over a large field that was also home to a royal palace during the Sukhothai period, which at the time was the city’s spiritual and political anchor.

Wat Phra Kaeo (also spelt Kaew) translates as Temple of the Emerald Buddha. It was named after a small but valuable nephrite Buddha image that was enshrined here in the early 1430s before being carted north to temples of the same name in Chiang Rai and later Vientiane and Bangkok, where it’s now revered as the Buddha image that’s thought to bring spiritual authority to the Thai king.

One of the most photographed sites at Wat Phra Kaeo.

Kamphaeng Phet’s _Wat Phra Kaeo_ is now a collection of ruins scattered around a large Sri Lankan-style bell-shaped chedi ringed by niches. At the centre of the complex, a large brick-and-plaster reclining Buddha image lies in front of two seated Buddha images, all displaying beautiful details in the faces and headdresses. Probably added to the complex in the early Ayutthaya era, the images are unique among the ruins of the ancient Sukhothai kingdom.

Keep wandering towards the back of Wat Phra Kaeo and you’ll find more ancient chedis, including one with a few elephant statues attached to a corner of the base. The eyes, tusks and delicate coiled trunks are still fully intact on some. Wat Phra Kaeo also features brick bases and pillars that once supported several wihaans and other structures. Some of these still have Buddha images so badly eroded that all you can see are the laterite cores looking like emaciated aliens.
Meet Wat Phra That.

Fronting Wat Phra Kaeo is **Wat Phra That**, featuring a massive Sri Lankan-style chedi with multiple tiers leading up to a slender spire that’s missing the uppermost piece. After you’re finished here you could pop up to the **Shiva Shrine** and **National Museum** before stopping by the City Pillar Shrine on the way to the **historical park’s northern zone**.

Kamphaeng Phet Historical Park: Northern zone

*A forest of ruins*

Kamphaeng Phet Historical Park’s northern zone is located around a kilometre northwest of the park’s central zone; and it is here where the historical park gets most interesting in our opinion, with venerable trees piercing into the ancient ruins.

Wat Phra Si Ariyabot and Wat Chang Rob are two sites that should not be missed, but we also recommend minor sites like Wat Kamphaeng Ngam and Wat Ma Phi, which are ideal for a few minutes of contemplation. Altogether the northern zone contains 40 different sites spread over a sizeable forested area.
Dry season is not peak season.

The first major site that you’ll see, on your left, after entering the historical park’s northern zone is **Wat Phra Non**, a large complex that blends into the forest. The ruins include the remains of several structures built from the 14th to 16th centuries, including a large ordination hall in front and a wihaan that once housed a reclining Buddha image towards the back. A two-metre-high laterite wall with narrow windows rims the sprawling grounds. Sema boundary stones depicting characters from the Ramakien epic were discovered here and can now be seen in the National Museum.

While there are no Buddha images or other individual attractions, the entire complex is a pleasure to wander through. Countless walls and wide laterite pillars stand alongside vast trees, making this is a prime place for a game of hide and seek.

Between Wat Phra Non and Wat Singh in the historical park’s northern zone, **Wat Phra Si Ariyabot** was named after a large Buddha image that still stands facing the forest at the back of the complex. Up front stands a massive two-metre-high brick base that once supported a wihaan. It must have been one of the largest buildings in the area; with some imagination you can picture it with a broad wooden roof sheltering chanting monks during the Sukhothai period. Off to the sides, a couple of badly damaged chedis still display some of the original circular patterns around the cracked stucco sides.

The highlight is Phra Si Ariyabot, a roughly six-metre-tall standing Buddha image that’s missing a left arm but otherwise is in good shape. While similar to Buddha images of the same name found in Sukhothai, this one has a flatter face that distinguishes it as being part of the Kamphaeng Phet school of Sukhothai-period art. The Buddha image is placed along the back wall of a thick brick mondop. Long ago the other three sides featured Buddha images in the walking, seated and reclining postures, but only the standing Buddha stuck it out through the centuries. If you see his buddies, tell them he could use some company.
Just north of Wat Phra Si Ariyabot, with a name that means the “Lion Temple”, **Wat Singh’s** dramatic brick-lane entranceway leads under low-hanging branches to a Buddha image sitting high above the ruins. Made of laterite bricks, the seated Buddha reveals a hint of detail in the eyes and nose, and a subduing Mara posture that’s still clearly evident. On either side stand smaller and more damaged laterite images that probably depict the Buddha’s two chief disciples, Mogallana and Sariputta. Wander around the side of the complex, beyond the outer wall, for a great photo of the Buddha seated among numerous flowering trees.

Further back at the base of a collapsed chedi, a series of four large niches face each of the four cardinal directions. Crumbling seated Buddha images remain in a couple of them, fronted by much smaller Buddha statues left by pilgrims. Unfortunately the lion guardian statues that gave the temple its name were carted away long ago.

From Wat Phra Singh, cruise straight west and keep left and, in the northwest corner of the zone, **Wat Chang Rob** boasts a Sri Lankan-style chedi with an imposing base ringed by what’s left of 68 elephant sculptures. Stretching 31 metres across on all four sides, the roughly three-metre-high laterite brick platform tops a small hill. Steep stairways lead to the top, where only the lower section of the chedi has stood through the centuries -- it must have been huge back in the day. Spindly grasses and flowering weeds reach from the laterite.

While none have held on to their trunks and some have been reduced to mounds of laterite bricks, many of the elephant statues still show off intricate carvings of ornaments around the chest and head.
legs and necks. It's easy to be distracted by the long lines of elephants, but also look between them to see reliefs of the Buddha meditating under the Bodhi tree along with hints of demons and devas. After encircling the chedi you might step back for a photo of the elephants framed by golden shower trees. You could then take either of two side lanes that shoot south and north from here to a number of minor ruins that blend into the forest.

![Photo of intricate details at Wat Chang Rob.](image)

Intricate details at Wat Chang Rob.

While the historic park's central zone seems like the obvious place to start, we suggest hitting the much-larger northern zone first, when your energy supply is high. You could then swing down to the National Museum for some air-con and background info before finishing with a bang at Wat Phra Kaeo in the central zone. Plan on losing a solid half-day exploring both zones and the museums by bicycle.

![Map of Kamphaeng Phet National Park.](image)

Click here or on the map above to see the location in Apple or Google maps.

**Kamphaeng Phet National Museum**

An excellent collection  
Wed-Sun 09:00-16:00
The Kamphaeng Phet National Museum and its sidekick, the Ruan Thai Museum, provide an in-depth look into the area’s long history while also exhibiting an intriguing collection of ancient artefacts.

The imposing Thai-style building begins with a display on prehistoric life in the area, featuring 2,500-year-old terracotta earrings and bronze bracelets. Then comes a set of Buddha heads and other relics of the Dvaravati civilisation that spanned much of modern Thailand from the fifth to 10th centuries, followed by a display on the Lavo (Lopburi) kingdom that helped to bridge the historical gap between Sukhothai and Ayutthaya.

The largest section is dedicated to Sukhothai-period arts mostly discovered in Kamphaeng Phet. Lavishly carved boundary stones, graceful Buddha images and intact 700-year-old ceramic vases are a few of the highlights. A centrepiece is the 500-year-old bronze image of Shiva (Phra Isuan) that once stood at the nearby San Phra Isuan Shrine.

After discussing Kamphaeng Phet’s role during the Ayutthaya and Bangkok periods, the museum ends with a large display on the various hill tribes and larger ethnic groups found in the province. Loads of comprehensible English information is available throughout the museum, and you can’t beat the air-con after a few hours of exploring the ruins.

Next door to the National Museum, the smaller Ruan Thai Museum (also called the Regional or Provincial Museum) is more notable for the structure itself than what it houses. Made of golden teak, the Central Thai-style stilted house has graceful pointed finials surrounding a large courtyard filled with potted plants and ceramic basins. Three rooms feature information boards and dollhouse-esque displays of scenes from old Kamphaeng Phet.

Kamphaeng Phet National Museum and Ruan Thai Museum are located 100 metres north of the main gate to the historical park’s central zone.

Click here or on the map above to see the location in Apple or Google maps.

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**San Phra Isuan (Shiva Shrine)**

_A sacred site_

*Around 200 metres south of the National Museum.*

Situated just northeast of the historical park's central zone, this small shrine has a laterite base with a bronze cast of the Hindu god Shiva, or Phra Isuan to the Thais.

In 1886, a German named J.E. Rustmann stole the head and hands of the image and smuggled them to Germany. It took a request from King Rama V to have them returned, and in exchange the Thai authorities graciously supplied a replica of the stolen goods to the Museum of Berlin. The image was exhibited in Bangkok’s National Museum before finally being returned to its rightful home in the early 20th century.

The statue enshrined here today is a replica; the original is displayed in the nearby National Museum. According to an ancient inscription on the base, the image "protects all two- and four-legged creatures" in Kamphaeng Phet. It's still revered by locals who offer incense and flowers. A Shiva lingam joins a pink depiction of Ganesha and a towering dipterocarp tree to give Phra Isuan some company.

*Click here or on the map above to see the location in Apple or Google maps.*

**Wat Phra Borommathat**

_Ancient riverside temple_

Another ancient site that's often passed by due to its location on the west bank of the Ping in the village of Nakhon Chum, Wat Phra Borommathat was founded in the Sukhothai days but now boasts a huge Burmese-style chedi.

The roughly 30-metre-tall chedi stands on the site of three smaller lotus-shaped chedis commissioned by Sukhothai’s King Lithai to enshrine relics of the Buddha in the mid-14th century. In the early 1900s a prominent Karen logger apparently covered the chedis with a
larger white-plaster chedi resembling Yangon’s Shwedagon Pagoda, albeit much smaller. How the logger had the clout to erase the work of a Sukhothai king is anyone’s guess.

A stone’s throw from the riverbank, the chedi has since been painted gold and is a focal point of the annual Nop Phra Len Phleng Festival, which coincides with the Makha Puja holiday on a full moon in February. A colourful procession of musicians and dancers cross the Ping from modern Kamphaeng Phet town to pay respects to the Buddha relics at Wat Phra Borommathat.

The temple also features an old ordination hall done up with vivid murals depicting scenes from the Buddha’s life and a seated Buddha image that appears to mimic Phitsanulok’s famous Phra Phuttha Chinnarat image. We arrived to find a young man doing a merit-making ceremony with a resident monk, though the hall may be closed when it’s not in use.

After checking out the temple you could head further south along the riverside road and grab lunch at one of several restaurants serving seafood on decks with river views.

Click here or on the map above to see the location in Apple or Google maps.

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KAMPHAENG PHET RIVERFRONT

Take it easy the local way  
Riverfront, Kamphaeng Phet

Kamphaeng Phet has taken full advantage of a one and a half kilometre stretch of riverfront by lining it with trees, steps and benches that are great for watching the sunset.

Across Sirijit Road from the main riverfront area, the large Sirichit Park is divided into two areas outfitted with playgrounds, exercise equipment, tennis and basketball courts, and walkways suitable for a jog. Each evening around sunset, several women set up chairs along the riverfront, across the road from the northern half of Sirichit Park, to offer foot massages -- you won’t find a better way to end a tiring day.
A stone's throw south of the southern portion of the park, just beyond the night market, a bridge leads to the riverine island of **Ko Klang**. Someday the small island will probably be developed into a lovely recreation area but at time of writing it's overgrown with a few rundown gazebos where locals go fishing. On the north side of the island is a derelict Chinese temple that's worth a peek if you're searching for something to do.

The northern part of Sirichit Park is located across from the riverfront at the west end of Tesa 1 Soi 12. The southern part is found just north of the night market between Tesa 1 Rd and Sirijit Rd.

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**Klong Lan National Park**

*Cool off in the jungle*

*Around 60km from Kamphaeng Phet*

*T: (055) 766 022 Daily 08:00-16:00*

[klonglan_np@hotmail.com](mailto:klonglan_np@hotmail.com)


Spread over 300 square kilometres on the west side of Kamphaeng Phet province, Klong Lan National Park is best known for a breathtaking 100-metre-high waterfall.

Located a short stroll from park headquarters, **Klong Lan Waterfall** includes several streams of water cascading over a 40-metre-wide cliff into a collection of pools suitable for swimming; it's possible to swim right up to the falls and let the water tumble down on top of you. With a back drop of lush mountains, Klong Lan is among Thailand's more picturesque waterfalls, particularly when it flows over the full width of the cliff face during the rainy months from July to October. The falls dry up to a trickle during the dry season, but the park is still a pleasant place to camp, hike and swim.
Impressive falls.

Some 25 kilometres east of park headquarters and also reachable via Route 1117, Khlong Nam Lai is a smaller waterfall that could be worth checking out if you're looking to go further into the jungle.

If you want to overnight in the park, simple fan cottages, camping, a convenience shop and restaurant are available near park headquarters. Nearby Khlong Lan village is mainly inhabited by Karen people; it's a good place to try the local food and pick up handmade wears direct from the villagers.

Click here or on the map above to see the location in Apple or Google maps.

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**Mae Wong National Park**

*Get out there*

Around 20 km south of Khlong Lan village  
T: (081) 881 4729  
Daily 08:00-16:00
Around 20 kilometres further south past Khlong Lan village, Route 1117 ends at Mae Wong National Park -- not to be confused with Mae Wang National Park in Chiang Mai province.

A remote 894 square kilometres of pristine forest that stretches all the way south into Nakhon Sawan province and west to Tak's Umphang district, Mae Wong is worth the effort if you want to get way out into the wilderness. While the park includes several waterfalls, the best require a two-night, three-day trek to reach. If you can manage that, the falls at Mae Gee crash over a 200 metre cliff, making it one of Thailand's tallest. Not quite as dramatic, Mae Rewa Waterfall flows over a sloped rock face into a wide pool that's great for swimming.

Smaller falls and rapids can be found several kilometres down a narrow, partially paved road that runs through a valley rimmed on either side by old-growth jungle. We believe that this road was once intended to continue all the way to Umphang, an isolated district in Thailand's far western frontier, but the plan was scrapped when environmentalists resisted in the 1990s. Rumour is that it's possible to undertake a seven-day trek along the planned route of this road, ending up in Umphang town. Bring a Thai speaker and chat up the rangers if you're interested.

Also within the park's boundaries is the formidable Khao Mokoju mountain, which soars to 1,964 metres and requires a five-day trek to the summit. A more manageable viewpoint is Chong Yen, reputed to be an outstanding sunset perch located 28 kilometres from park headquarters along the only road. On the way you might spot a wild jackal, porcupine, exotic bird (the park has around 450 avian species), orchids and rare flowers that grow in the high altitudes.

A campground, basic accommodation, restaurant and small hot spring pool are available near park headquarters, where a helicopter landing pad draws attention to just how remote Mae Wong is. If visiting by car or motorbike, you'll need to fill out a form at headquarters before heading further into the park. Though maps and brochures are only provided in Thai, rangers at the visitor centre can speak limited English and it's possible to arrange guided treks. Tents can be rented for 200 baht while the bungalows start at 1,500 baht and can sleep five or more people.
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Transport

Bus

Kamphaeng Phet’s bus station is located off Highway 101, a kilometre west of the river. Guesthouses and hotels can arrange transport to the station, where motorbike taxis and songthaews can give travellers a lift into town for 30 to 80 baht.

Sample fares include:

- **Aranyaprathet (Cambodia border):** A bus departs at 22:00 for 453 baht and takes more than 12 hours.
- **Bangkok (Morchit):** Hourly buses depart from 09:00 to 24:00 and cost 200 baht for second class or around 260 baht for first class. A VIP bus departs at 12:30 for 300 baht. The trip takes around seven hours and also services Nakhon Sawan and Ayutthaya, among others.
- **Chiang Mai:** A mix of first- and second-class buses depart roughly every hour from 11:30 to 22:30, cost 200 to 270 baht and take around seven hours. Also services Tak, Lampang and Lamphun.
- **Chiang Rai:** Buses depart at 12:30, 18:00 and 22:30 for 340 baht and take around eight hours.
- **Fang:** A bus departs at 12:30 for 355 baht and takes nine hours.
- **Kanchanaburi:** Buses depart at 12:30 and 23:00 for 293 baht and take six hours. Also services Suphanburi.
- **Khlong Lan:** Orange songthaews depart at 08:00 and 10:30 and then hourly from 12:00 to 16:00.
- **Mae Hong Son:** A first class bus departs at 22:00 for 510 baht and a VIP bus departs at 23:00 for 900 baht. The trip takes around 12 hours.
- **Nan:** A bus departs at 14:00 for 276 baht and takes seven hours. Also services Phrae.
- **Phitsanulok:** Buses depart every one to two hours from 05:00 to 18:00 for 60 to 80 baht and take two hours.
- **Rayong:** Buses depart at 10:40, 20:30 and 23:00 for 400 baht and take around 10 hours. Also services Pattaya for 384 baht.
- **Sukhothai:** Blue songthaews depart hourly from 07:30 to 12:30 for 65 baht and take 1.5 hours. Regular buses depart at 11:00, 13:30, 16:30, 18:30, 20:30 and 01:30 for 53 baht.
- **Tak:** Red songthaews depart every half-hour from 06:00 to 18:00 for 50 baht and take more than an hour. Chiang Mai-bound buses also stop in Tak. If heading to Mae Sot, make a transfer in Tak.
- **Trat:** A bus departs at 20:30 for 575 baht and takes around 12 hours. Also services Chanthaburi.

Getting around

- **Bicycles** can be rented at Three J Guesthouse and other hotels for 50 baht. Three J also rents out a few auto and manual **motorbikes** for 200 baht per day. Maroon songthaews cruise along main roads like Bumrungrat and Tesa and then cross the bridge to the bus station.

Kamphaeng Phet has a small number of purple-vested motorbike taxis; you'll find them at the bus station and day market but don't expect to flag one down whenever you need. Dark-blue songthaews can be arranged as private taxis at the bus station.