



# Excursions from Bangkok

## Ayuthaya Historical Park p168

Thailand's heroic former capital, Ayuthaya is a Unesco World Heritage site and a major pilgrimage site for anyone interested in ancient history.

## Ko Samet p171

This island, only a few hours from Bangkok, has famously squeaky sand beaches and accommodation to fit any budget.

## Amphawa p174

Amphawa's canal-side setting and ancient wooden houses look like they are straight out of a movie; its homestays provide an up-close experience of this unique community.

## Phetchaburi (Phetburi) p176

Phetchaburi's temples and peak-roofed wooden houses combine to form the epitome of central Thai life.

## Kanchanaburi p181

Recent history is only a train ride away in Kanchanaburi, where vivid museums and touching monuments bring home the area's history as a WWII labour camp.

## Khao Yai p185

Home to Khao Yai National Park, one of Thailand's biggest and best reserves, where mountainous monsoon forests boast hundreds of resident species.



## TOP SIGHT AYUTHAYA HISTORICAL PARK

อุทยานประวัติศาสตร์อยุธยา

**Ancient ruins, a rural Thai vibe, tasty food, good-value accommodation – and all this only 70km from Bangkok: Ayuthaya is the easiest and most worthwhile escape from the Big Mango.**

The riverside city served as the seat of one of ancient Thailand's most powerful kingdoms until 1767, when it was destroyed in warfare by the Burmese. Today the ruins of the former capital, **Ayuthaya Historical Park**, are one of Thailand's biggest tourist sites. They're separated into two distinct districts: the ruins 'on the island', in the central part of town west of Th Chee Kun, are most easily visited on bicycle (40B to 50B per day) or motorbike (250B to 300B per day); those 'off the island', opposite the river from the centre, are best visited by evening boat tour (200B per person). For more detailed descriptions of the ruins, pick up the *Ayuthaya* booklet from the Ayutthaya Tourist Center.

### On the Island

#### Ayutthaya Tourist Center

This **museum** (ศูนย์ท่องเที่ยวอยุธยา; ☎035 246076; ⌚8.30am-4.30pm) **FREE** should be your first stop in Ayuthaya, as the excellent upstairs exhibition hall puts everything in context and describes the city's erstwhile glories, while the ground-floor TAT office has lots of maps and good advice.

#### Wat Phra Si Sanphet

This was once the largest **temple** (วัดพระศรีสรรเพชญ์; admission 50B; ⌚8am-6pm) in Ayuthaya and was used as the royal temple/palace by several kings. Built in the late 15th century, the compound contained a 16m standing Buddha coated with up to 250kg of gold, later melted down and carted off by the Burmese conquerors. Its three Ayuthaya-style *chedi* (stupas) have come to be identified with Thai art more than any other style.

#### Wihan Phra Mongkhon Bophit

This **sanctuary hall** (วิหารพระมงคลบพิตร; ⌚8am-5pm) **FREE** houses one of the largest bronze Buddha images in Thailand. This 12.5m-high figure (17m with the base) was badly damaged by a lightning-induced fire around 1700 and then again when the Burmese sacked the city. The Buddha and the building were repaired in the 20th century.

#### Wat Phra Ram

**Wat Phra Ram** (วัดพระราม; admission 50B; ⌚8am-6pm) may mark the cremation site of King U Thong, though its history is unclear. It has one of the tallest *Brahm* (Khmer-style tower) in Ayuthaya, though the surrounding grounds are less extensive than the better known sites. One good reason to visit is that few other people do.

#### Wat Ratchaburana

**Wat Ratchaburana** (วัดราชบูรณะ; admission 50B; ⌚8am-6pm) dates back to the early 15th century and contains *chedi* and faded murals that are among the oldest in the country.

#### Wat Mahathat

This **wat** (วัดมหาธาตุ; Th Chee Kun; admission 50B; ⌚8am-6pm) features one of the first *Brahm* built in the capital and an evocative Buddha head engulfed by finger-like tree roots – the most photographed site in Ayuthaya.

### DON'T MISS...

- ➔ A crash course in local history at the Ayutthaya Tourist Center
- ➔ Wat Phra Si Sanphet
- ➔ The riverside setting at Wat Chai Wattanaram
- ➔ Ancient murals at Wat Ratchaburana

### PRACTICALITIES

- ➔ อุทยานประวัติศาสตร์อยุธยา
- ➔ individual sites 50B, day passes 220B
- ➔ ⌚8am-5pm