

FREEWHEEL

■ PONGPET MEKLOY



AWAY

■ PICHAYA SVASTI

Happy Birthday, Bangkok

This weekend, the “237th Anniversary of the Establishment of Bangkok” celebrations will take place in the compounds of Bangkok National Museum and the National Theatre.

- At the museum, the programme is as follows:

On Friday, Thai classical music will be performed from 5pm, followed by the opening ceremony and a historical play at 6pm, international performances at 7pm, a fashion show at 8pm and the *lakhon nok* play *Sang Thong* from 9-10pm.

On Saturday, Thai classical music will be played from 5pm, followed by international performances at 6pm, a historical play at 7pm and folk performances from Thailand’s four regions from 8-10pm.

On Sunday, the programme from 5pm to 8pm is the same as Friday. Then from 8-10pm, there will be a *khon* masked performance of the *Maha Dhammika Raja* episode of the *Ramakien*.

- At the National Theatre’s Outdoor Stage 1, the programme is as follows:

The Rattanakosin Junior Pageant Contest will be held at 5pm every day.

On Friday, long drum, *ramwong*, coconut shell and rice harvest dances will be staged from 6-9pm.

On Saturday, there will be bamboo, baton, *khon* and monkey dances, and *luk thung* music from 6-9pm.

On Sunday, a *lakhon chatri* play, *ponglang* music, lion dance, boat song and rice harvest dance will be performed from 6-9pm.

- On the National Theatre’s Outdoor Stage 2, the programme is as follows:

Friday will see a *ramwong* dance, *nang talung* shadow puppet show, and *ponglang*, Khmer and *morlam* music performances from 5-9pm.

On Saturday, there will be *sud chatri*, *chui chai*, *likay hulu*, drum and Phrae folk dances, and a performance of *molam* music from 5-9pm.

Sunday will see a *kratua taeng sua* performance, *nora* and Kamphaeng Phet tribal dances, Nakhon Ratchasima folk songs and *molam* music from 5-9pm.

For more information, call the National Theatre at 02-224-1387.

Art in Hong Kong

Until March 23, the annual Hong Kong Arts Festival will feature 166 performances and over 300 activities, including opera, theatre, music and dance, by more than 1,700 artists from around the world at various venues.

Meanwhile, two visual arts festivals — Art Basel Hong Kong (March 29-31) and Art Central (March 27-31) — will be held at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre. These events will welcome 242 galleries from 36 countries.

Visit discoveryhongkong.com.

Email pichayas@bangkokpost.co.th if you have any news to share.

Ancient Thailand, under threat

Centuries before the rise of Sukhothai, and even the Khmer Empire preceding it, the Dvaravati civilisation (6th-11th century) dominated much of what is now Thailand. Few ruins from the period remain. The largest, and one of the best preserved, is Khao Khlang Nok, the grand stupa in Si Thep Historical Park in Phetchabun province.

The Dvaravati monument and the park, which hopes to one day be included in Unesco’s list of World Heritage sites, have recently been a hot topic in the media. But not because of the Unesco bid. (The nomination is still in the planning process.) Si Thep was in the news because an oil drilling operation is set to be carried out close to Khao Khlang Nok stupa. How close? Reportedly, around 100 metres.

Civic groups in the province as well as the Fine Arts Department, which oversees the historical park, protested the project, as it is a potential threat to the 1,300-year-old religious monument. While it is still unclear how the conflict will be resolved, perhaps we should take the opportunity to get to know a few things about Khao Kiang Nok and Si Thep.

The historical park can be explored on foot or, even better, by bicycle. According to archaeological studies, the area now designated as the historical park has been

inhabited since prehistoric times. Excavations have turned up human skeletons buried with pottery and other objects dating back 2,000 years. Over the centuries, the settlement developed. During the Dvaravati period, which was heavily influenced by Indian cultures, it became a moated town, and continued to prosper throughout the period of Khmer dominance.

A large number of ancient ruins from these periods scatter the park’s 2km² and the surrounding areas. The most prominent within the moat’s perimeter is Khao Khlang Nai, the remains of another large Dvaravati-style stupa. However, this looks like a miniature when compared to Khao Khlang

Nok, 2km or so to the north. Before the excavation both grand stupas were covered with soil and vegetation, so much so they looked like hills, hence the word “*khao*” (hill) in their current names.

While Khao Khlang Nai was restored a long time ago, the ruins of Khao Khlang Nok were not revealed until archaeological excavation began in 2008. The square base of the enormous stupa measures 64m x 64m. On each side, there is a stairway

leading to the upper part from which you can see far and wide in every direction. To the west, about 20km away, you can spot Khao Thamohrat, a real hill which is home to a cave where rock sculptures from the Dvaravati period were discovered. Too bad the pagoda that sits at the centre of Khao Khlang Nok has crumbled beyond repair.

Many fear that, if the drilling operation is allowed to go ahead, it will cause damage to the rare ancient structure. Onshore oil drilling has been going on throughout Central Region for decades. With big money involved, the fight to preserve Khao Khlang Nok won’t be easy.

If you get the chance to visit the site, you’ll understand why the protesters believe this ancient architectural gem is too precious for Thailand to risk losing it.

Well, due to a lack of time available to me for riding, this column will no longer appear as regularly as it used to. Still, I hope to see you here again soon. Until then, if you have questions, news or biking insights you wish to share, please feel free to send an email to pongpetm@bangkokpost.co.th or go to Freewheel Bangkok community page on Facebook.

Pongpet Mekloy is the Bangkok Post’s travel editor and a mountain bike freak.



SI THEP HISTORICAL PARK, PHETCHABUN

GPS coordinates:

Park office 15°28'12.30" N 101°08'46.86" E

Khao Khlang Nok 15°29'11.78" N 101°08'40.05" E

Trail condition: Traffic-free dirt and paved roads inside the park. On the road between the park’s moated zone and Khao Khlang Nok you will have to share the way with motorised vehicles.

Distance: Up to you.

Getting there: The road to Si Thep Historical Park, No. 2219, crosses paths with Highway 21 at Si Thep intersection. Follow the 2219 eastwards for about 12km and you’ll see the park’s huge sign on your right-hand side. To get to Khao Khlang Nok, you have to backtrack to the 2219 and go westward for about 800m. The access road to Khao Khlang Nok is next to Ban Bueng Na Chan School.

Parking: The park’s office has a parking lot. So does Khao Khlang Nok.

Food & drink: Shops and modest restaurants can be found in the community on the west side of the park.

What your family can enjoy while waiting: If they don’t want to explore the historical park with you, tell them to stay home!

Accommodation: There are several resorts along Highway 21 and in Chai Badan, as well as the area around Pa Sak Dam.

Local contact: Call Si Thep Historical Park at 056-921-322.



BEEN THERE DONETHAT

AS EXPERIENCED BY
PICHAYA SVASTI

ROOM NUMBER
308
HUEN BON SUITE

Raya Heritage

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Raya Heritage is a newly-opened luxury riverside suite property which describes itself as an artisanal resort. It is inspired by the art and craftsmanship of Lanna as well as of Laos, Myanmar’s Shan State and China’s Yunnan province. Its 33 suites are decorated with tailor-made furniture, handwoven fabrics, pottery, wood carvings and bamboo baskets in three tones: cotton white, ebony black and indigo blue.

ATMOSPHERE

The ambience is elegant and tranquil. Surrounded by lush gardens overlooking the Ping River, the resort is a three-storey building with a terracotta tiled hip roof and wooden columns and beams. The high-ceiling interior is a traditional northern Thai design with a contemporary twist.

LOCATION

The resort is a 30-minute drive from Chiang Mai International Airport and a 20-minute drive from Chiang Mai city centre. There is a free hourly shuttle service to sister resort Tamarind Village in downtown Chiang Mai from 9am to 10pm.

CLEANLINESS

The suite was spotless. The white and cream cotton bedding, curtains, pillows and textiles in the room were clean. The pool, spa, gym, gardens and other facilities were well-maintained.

SERVICE QUALITY

The hotel staff provided excellent service. They were polite, friendly and eager to serve guests. When I had trouble with one of the door locks to my room, they were quick to fix it. Check-in and checkout were fast and trouble-free. The free shuttle service was punctual.

FACILITIES

My suite was accessible via a private staircase. It boasted a spacious terrace, bathroom and dressing area. Another type of room, the Kraam Pool Suite, has a 3x7m private pool. The resort has a pool, tea terrace and lounge. The gym is small yet well-equipped.

F&B

The resort’s only restaurant, Kru Khao, serves fine authentic northern cuisine all day, but it took a long time for the food to arrive. Breakfast can be ordered from the à la carte menu. Recommended dishes include nam prik ong (minced pork and tomato chilli paste), Shan-style vermicelli, pad thai noodles and yok manee.

GUEST SAFETY

The resort has a security system with guards on duty 24/7 at the entrance and in the compound and CCTV cameras installed in all public areas. It has fire extinguishers in all of its buildings and the fire fighting system is tested annually. Every suite has a smoke detector and safe.

ENVIRONMENTAL & SOCIAL CONCERNS

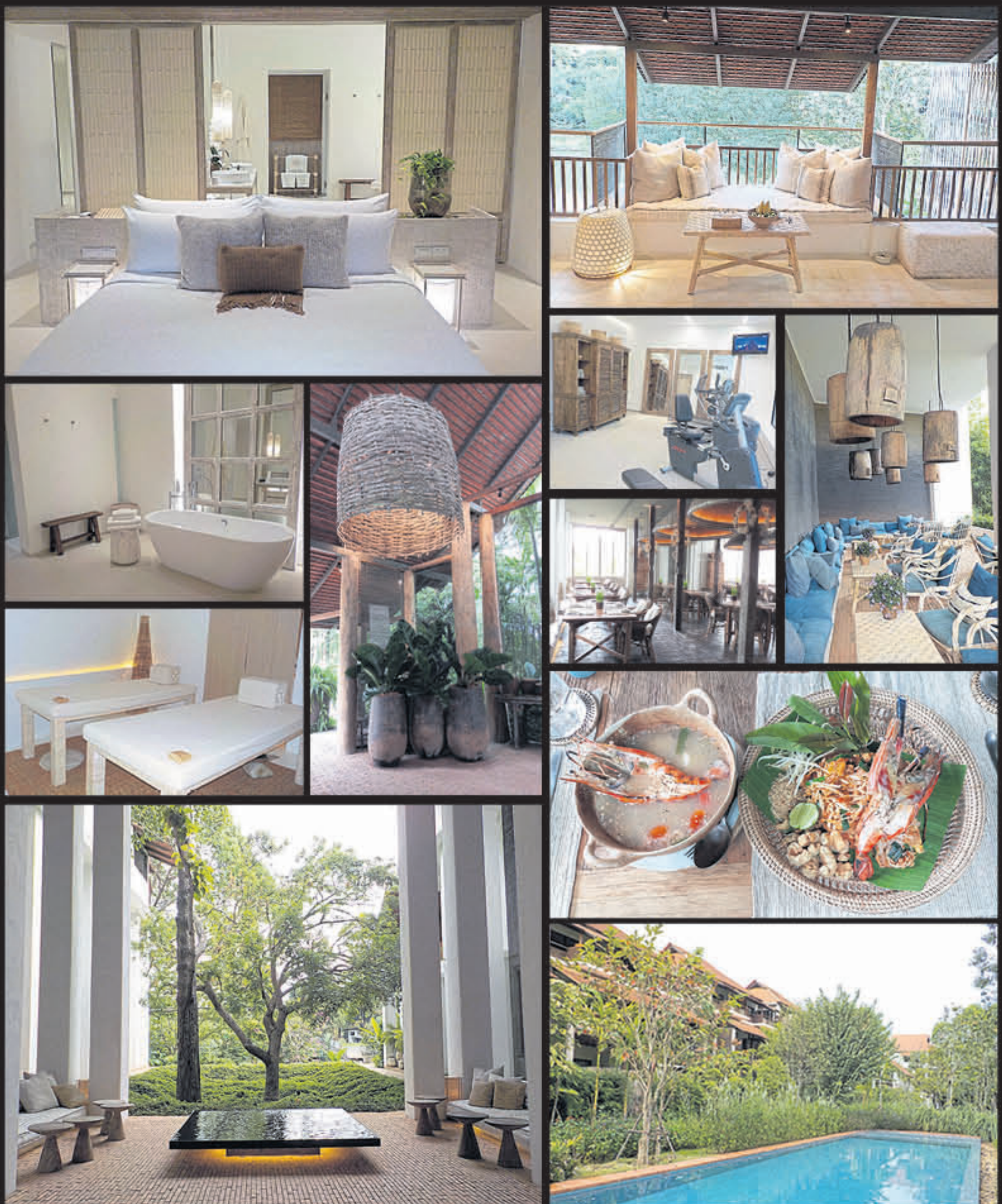
The resort has its own wastewater treatment system and uses treated wastewater for gardening. It uses LED bulbs and produces hot water using the heat from air-conditioners. It follows a zero waste policy and supports local schools. It buys organic rice and farm produce from northern communities and organises organic farm tours there.

SPA

The resort’s Ai Waan Spa provides a range of facial and body treatments with a focus on northern Thai remedies and the well-being of the body, mind and spirit. It has a northern Thai steam therapy room.

RATE

The best Internet rates per room per night with breakfast for two persons start from 13,090 baht++ for Huen Bon and Rin Terrace Suites (75sqm) and 23,800 baht++ for Kraam Pool Suites (100sqm).



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