

2010

# Ayutthaya – Khlong Hantra Kayaking Track



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AYUTTHAYA HISTORICAL RESEARCH [AHR]

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## AYUTTHAYA – KHLONG HANTRA (The Canal of the Division of the Seal)

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This kayak tour has been designed to introduce you to the riverside life of one of the very last canals on the main land of the City of Ayutthaya, which is still in good condition and although silted, not yet filled up as such was the fate of most of the canals on the city island.

Khlong Hantra or like Cushman would translate it, the "Canal of the Division of the Seal" flows through the sub-district of the same name (Tambon Han Tra), formerly referred to as the Hantra Plains. This canal was once a stretch of the Pa Sak River, meandering around the former Ban Ma (Horse village), east of Ayutthaya. When the latter was deviated towards the Front city moat at some stage, the old riverbed, was divided up in different canals being: Khlong Hantra (from Wat Pa Kho till Wat Krasang), Khlong Kramang (from Wat Krasang till the entry of Khlong Dusit), Khlong Dusit (called after Wat Dusitaram on its west bank) and Khlong Khao San (with its mouth at the present Pa Sak River, being the southern end of the former Front city moat).

Khlong Hantra is one of the most important former canals, east of Ayutthaya, bordering the ancient Ayodhya area. Ayodhya covered parts of the present Phai Ling, Hantra and Khlong Suan Phlu sub-districts. The area was probably already populated during the Dvaravati era (6th to the 11th centuries). Sources suggest that the Khmers occupied the area as early as 850-1000 AD and established an outpost here, naming it Ayodhya after the ancient and 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.

There is evidence that a community settled in this area much earlier than 1351 - the official date of establishment of the city of Ayutthaya. Chinese merchants set up an important commercial center in this area for conducting trade with the Sukhothai kingdom. This area was originally connected to the city island, since the Pa Sak River had yet to be deviated for defensive and navigational purposes. However, the boundaries of the ancient city are still subject of debate. When King U-Thong arrived at Wiang Lek in 1347, as thus a number of architectural structures already existed.

Khlong Hantra houses three active Buddhist monasteries: Wat Pa Kho at its mouth on the southern canal bank, Wat Hantra on its eastern bank and Wat Krasang at its confluence with Khlong Kramang Phai Ling. The Hantra Field played also a role in Ayutthaya's defenses, as it was one of the areas where a large wooden fort - the Thong Na Hantra Fort - was built. In 1581 the Hantra plains were used to constitute a Siamese army of 100.000 soldiers, 800 elephants and 1500 horses to prepare an attack on the Cambodian capital of Lawaek. The campaign was not successful as the City of Lawaek did not surrender and the Siamese army had to give up its siege, due to insufficient food supplies. It was also in this area that Phraya Tak, the later King Taksin, with his followers broke through the Burmese encirclement of Ayutthaya at Hantra Village in 1766.

The tour will take 3-4 hours according to your level of physical fitness, the conditions of the water current, and your personal kayaking experience. Travel time will expand if you stop to visit every highlight listed on this tour itinerary. Nevertheless, we have listed a few extra sites

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for the sake of smoother navigation and to alert kayakers to possible locations for obtaining water and other supplies. Individual kayakers 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 monasteries, visit our website at [www.ayutthaya-history.com](http://www.ayutthaya-history.com).

### **Tips and Warnings**

The only location in Ayutthaya, which offers kayaks for rent is “The Seven Seas Restaurant”, located opposite the railway station. The restaurant has kayaks available for renting to tourists ([www.ayutthaya-sevenseas.com](http://www.ayutthaya-sevenseas.com)). As thus, the starting point of this kayak tour begins at the Seven Seas Restaurant.

Be aware that from time to time Khlong Hantra could be clogged up by water hyacinth, making paddling difficult or even impossible. It is not possible to predict such a blockage, as it depends mainly on the swift action of the local authorities in regular maintaining the waterway and keeping it open for navigation. Water hyacinths are a reoccurring problem on virtually every river and canal in Thailand.

Ayutthaya, although located far away from the Gulf of Thailand, is still under tidal influence. The Pa Sak River at Ayutthaya is thus a tidal river, causing the river to shift direction once a day. The tidal action is predictable. A tidal table of Bangkok can be found at <http://www.mobilegeographics.com:81/locations/362.html> (add 7 hours to the Bangkok local time). It may be useful to adjust your itinerary in function of these shifting currents and do some of the kayaking routes in reverse if missing stamina.

Be aware for the whirlpools and heavy current between Ko Loy – Ayutthaya Boat Building School and the eastern Pa Sak River Bank, especially during the second part of the rainy season (September – November). In normal months, stick close to eastern river bank; From September to November stick to the western river bank and cross the Pa Sak River in front of “The Seven Seas” kayak landing. Wear a life jacket and hook up your equipment!

Protect you from sunshine. Wear a hat and loose-fitting clothing that covers arms and legs. Use a sun blocker product on exposed parts of the body. It is important to bring a large bottle of water aboard.

On the water, exercise caution!

### **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

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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 case of 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 (\$)*

*Boat dock present marked as (+)*

- ❖ *From the starting point, the kayak landing of “The Seven Seas Restaurant”, kayak in the direction south along the Pa Sak River (direction of the floating restaurants). Just behind the floating restaurants, on your left hand side, you will find the mouth of Khlong Ban Bat and Wat Phichai Songkhram standing on the south bank. Enter the canal.*

**Khlong Ban Bat** could be translated as the "Canal of the Village of the Alms-Bowl" and is situated in Phai Ling sub-district. The waterway links the present Pa Sak River with Khlong Kramang (Phai Ling) and Khlong Dusit.

**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.

- ❖ *Keep on paddling until you arrive at a fork. The southern branch (right) is the mouth of Khlong Dusit, while the eastern branch (left) is the start of Khlong Kramang. Stear your kayak into the southern fork, being Khlong Kramang.*

**Khlong Dusit** flows through the Phai Ling sub-district. At par with Khlong Hantra, Khlong Kramang and Khlong Khao San, this canal was once a stretch of the Pa Sak River. Khlong Dusit derived its name from the monastery Wat Dusit situated on its east bank. Dusit is the Thai translation for the Sanskrit word "Tush" meaning "to be content" or "that in which all desires are satisfied". It is referring to the "Tushita Heaven", the "joyful heaven" or "the heavens of the joyous", the fourth Deva heaven above the earth in which the almost perfect beings, about to become Buddhas, pass their last angelic life before being born on earth to assume the Buddha hood.

- ❖ *Continue paddling on Khlong Kramang. Shortly after you have passed a bridge, you will find the entry of Khlong Kudi Dao at your left hand side. At its mouth stands the restored ruin of Wat Nang Kham.*

**Wat Nang Kham** or the "Monastery of the Mistress Kham" is a restored ruin located in Tambon Phai Ling, close to the bank of the Ban Bat canal. Following archaeological evidence

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found in situ, this temple was built in the Early Ayutthaya period. Restoration took place in the reign of King Borommakot. The temple consists of an ubosot or ordination hall and a main chedi. From the ubosot, only its stone foundation remains. The principal pagoda is bell-shaped on an octagonal base. A staircase at the east side leads towards the entry of the chedi. The complex was surrounded by an outer wall.

- ❖ *Continue paddling along Khlong Kramang. After a while you will find a large opening on your left hand side. This is the entry of Lake Maheyong. Explore it at leisure.*

**Maheyong Lake** is situated south of Wat Maheyong and Wat Chang. This beautiful hidden lake was likely formed as a result of the closure and the filling-up of Khlong Maheyong and some other ancient canals in this neighborhood. The lake has become an important bird refuge in the city.

- ❖ *After leaving the lake, continue paddling Khlong Kramang. The next point of interest is Wat Phraya Tikaram at your right hand side on the southern canal bank. On the premises of the temple is a small shop where you can buy some cool drinks.*
- ❖ *A bit further you will arrive at a confluence of three canals. The eastern branch is Khlong Khao Mao; its entry is blocked by a water gate. The northern branch is Khlong Hantra. At the confluence stands Wat Kramang.*

**Wat Phraya Tikaram** is an active monastery located along the south bank of Khlong Kramang. In situ are the classic monastic structure, which forms a temple complex such as: the ordination hall, the principal chedi, the meditation hall, the meru and the dormitories of the monk's. There is not much known about this monastery's history or its date of establishment. (+)

**Wat Krasang** is an active monastery situated at the intersection of three canals, being Khlong Hantra, Khlong Kramang and Khlong Khao Mao. It is a classic Buddhist temple, dating from the post-Ayutthayan era.

- ❖ *Take the northern fork and paddle into Khlong Hantra. This canal was once a stretch of the Pa Sak River, meandering around the former Ban Ma (Horse village), east of Ayutthaya. Soon you will arrive at Wat Hantra, located at your right hand side.*

**Wat Hantra** - The countryside canal you are kayaking on has been named after this monastery. In the Ayutthayan Chronicles we find that the monastery has been built in the reign of Borommakot (r. 1733-1758). It was also close to Ban Hantra translated by Cushman as "Village of the Division of the Seal", that the later King Taksin, broke through the Burmese encirclement end 1766, in his escape to the south. Wat Hantra is an active monastery with Buddhist clergy providing religious services to the lay community. It has the standard building required for such a temple (ordination hall, sermon hall, crematorium, bell tower,

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funeral chedi, and monks' quarters). These building are mostly designed in the Late Ayutthaya – Early Ratanakosin style. (+)

- ❖ *Continue kayaking north and enjoy the peaceful riverside life. After two kilometers and having passed the railway bridge, you will arrive at the confluence with the Pa Sak River. At the junction of the Hantra canal and the river stands Wat Pa Kho. In front of you, on the opposite bank of the Pa Sak River, you will see the mouth of another canal, Khlong Oom. The latter was before a loop of the old Pa Sak River.*

**Wat Pa Kho** or the "Monastery of the Forest of the Kho Trees" is strategically located at the mouth of the Hantra Canal and its junction with the new Pa Sak River. The riverside temple is in use by the Buddhist clergy and its establishment is dating from the Ratanakosin period. (+)

- ❖ *At the confluence, turn south (to the left) and continue to follow the left bank of the Pa Sak River. Stay close to the river bank to avoid the whirlpools near the head of Ko Loy or "floating Island", where Ayutthaya's Boot Building School is situated. After the bend opposite the school, you are close to your end point. Keep alert to the ferryboats crossing in the area, since they don't always pay attention to kayakers in their path.*



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