

Naga:
The Spirit of a Nation
Driving Soft Power,
Inspiring Culture,
and Fuelling
Thailand's Economy



Office of the Permanent Secretary,
the Prime Minister's Office

NAGA for the People and Communities

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The Soft Power Empowering People,
Professions, and Sustainability



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Project Overview:
“NAGA for the People and Communities”

The Office of the Permanent Secretary, the Prime Minister’s Office has undertaken the book project ‘NAGA for the People and Communities’ as a source of information about the Naga in Thai society. The project aims to elevate the Naga as a form of soft power to raise awareness among children, youth, and the general public about Naga in Thai culture from the past to the present, which has been declared one of the national identities under the category of mythical creatures. The project also aims to highlight cultural tourism sites, local cuisines, community products, and contemporary artists’ workpieces related to Naga in order to be a reliable source of research and references that can be used further.

Featuring 10 impressive and inspiring stories related to Naga from all the regions across Thailand, perspectives and insight on developing local areas are offered to be used as a model of community learning centres and modern grassroots economies with a ‘From Local to Legacy’ concept from the locals who are driven by passion, happiness, and volunteer spirit, committed to building strong, prosperous, and sustainable communities for the future.

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Naga: A National Identity of Thailand

At the Cabinet Meeting on 1 November 2022, the Cabinet approved the Phaya Nak or Naga (a legendary great serpent-like creature) as one of the national identities under the category of mythical creatures. This symbolic declaration aims to promote the nation's history, identity, and cultural heritage, which will be the foundation for raising the Naga into a form of soft power to drive the creative economy, enhance economic value, and generate national income.

(Top) Naga stairway at Wat Phra That Doi Suthep, Chiang Mai province

The Belief in the Naga and Its Role in Social Transformation through the Design for Preservation, Continuity and Innovation

The belief in the Naga has long influenced social changes, especially in the arts—from architecture, sculpture, and painting to traditional handicrafts of Thai people since the society's founding period. The graceful elegance of Naga-inspired art sparks inspiration, creativity, and imagination for those who see them, fostering a touching appreciation of cultural beauty.



Architecture

Naga is deeply rooted and significantly influences Thai architecture, especially religious buildings such as ubosots (ordination halls), viharas (assembly halls), and stupas. The examples can be clearly seen in Naga balustrades, Naga walls, Naga arch, Naga image, Naga-shaped eaves, etc. These architectural elements reflect the graceful flowing form resembling the movement of a river, inspiring people's visions.

In addition, the widespread Naga image at the temple gate or along temple walls indicates that the Naga also symbolises the divine guardian of the sanctuary. For example, in Northern Thailand, almost every temple depicts two Naga on the temple wall with their heads emerging on the sides of the temple gate. Moreover, the Makara (a Hindu mythical sea-creature) disgorging a Naga is usually depicted on the stairways leading up to the ubosot, strengthening the divine guardian status of the Naga as the ubosot is considered the most sacred area within a temple. Symbolising the residence of the Buddha and the spiritual centre of the universe, the Naga, with a protective and auspicious nature, is entrusted with guarding such sanctuaries.

*(Top) Wat Rong Khun, Mueang Chiang Rai district, Chiang Rai province.
Designed and constructed by Chalermchai Kositpipat, National Artist*



Sculpture

Naga-inspired sculptures are also profound in Thai art. The inspiration can be seen in the architectural ornaments such as Chofa, Bairaka, and Hanghong; the prows of Anantanakharat and Anekkachatphuchong royal barges; racing boat designs; the iconic Garuda Yut Naga (Garuda seizing with a Naga) image; and the Naga elements used in the Thera Abhiseka ceremony or the hodsong (monastic bathing) in the Northeast, etc. These sculptures are not only symbols of divine protection but also a symbol of abundance, power and peace.

Apart from its significance in meaning, the sculpture also enhances local tourism. For example, the Naga stairways of Wat Phra That Doi Suthep in Chiang Mai province are embedded with majestic art and historical value, invite pilgrims and tourists to ascend and pay homage, and bless them with good fortune. Such works embody local wisdom and community identity, showcasing the belief and faith in the Naga and the effort to sustain cultural tourism, with Naga sculptures as the key landmark.

*(Left) Garuda Yut Naga surrounding the ubosot of Wat Phra Kaew
(Right) Buddhist motif of Makara disgorging a Naga, Wat Phra That Doi Suthep, Chiang Mai province*





Painting

Painting related to the Naga is mainly found in traditional mural art, particularly on the walls of ubosots, viharas, and sermon halls. The mural usually depicts the scenes from the life of the Buddha, the Jatakas—especially the Ten Great Birth Stories and the Vessantara Jataka. Such murals include the depiction of Kala Nagaraja guarding the Buddha’s alms bowl in the Bhaddakappa era, Mucalinda Nagaraja sheltering the meditating Buddha—the origin of the Naga-protecting Buddha image, and Bhuridatta Nagaraja from the Bhuridatta Jataka as well as the scene of the Naga shrine visited by the three Kassapa ascetics.

These murals are inspired by stories in the Tipitaka and Jataka commentaries, which portrayed the Nagaraja (Naga King) as a real being as stated in the scriptures and passed down into visual narratives on temple walls across Thailand and other Buddhist countries along the Mekong River, such as Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Vietnam. All share a commonality in depicting the existence of the Naga due to the common origin in Buddhist scriptures, the Tipitaka.

*(Left) The Naga at Kamchanod, Udon Thani province
(Right) Naga Mural by Athiwat Singhawarat, Independent Artist*

Handicrafts

Craft directly associated with the Naga is the bai sri (rice offering) arrangements used in Naga worship rituals, found throughout all regions of Thailand. The purpose of making the Naga bai sri is to create a sacred vessel to welcome the Naga from the underworld and use it as a ceremonial offering. This demonstrates the intertwined relationship between Naga-related handicrafts and the way of life in Thai society.

The craft is commonly seen in the local rituals and ceremonies across all regions, especially in the Northeast and the North. In some particular rituals—such as the Su Khwan (soul-calling) rituals and teacher-honouring rites, the Naga bai sri is always present.

The concept and belief behind the making of the Naga bai sri is that the spirit of the Naga will reside, be acknowledged, and be pleased with the act of devotion. In return, they will offer protection and guard the objects enshrined in the place, such as Buddha images, stupas, relics, and other sacred entities. This is seen in the Phaya Si Sattanakaraj worship ritual at the Phaya Si Sattanakaraj Landmark in Mueang Nakhon Phanom district, Nakhon Phanom province.

(Top) Tourists travel to pay their respects and perform Naga worship rituals at Kamchanod, Udon Thani province.



The Naga-related art has an intense emotional impact on those who see it. The art is beautiful, graceful, lively, and lifelike movement resembling the waves. In Buddhist art, Naga is commonly depicted as powerful mythical beings with the power to summon rains and a symbol of abundance, prosperity, happiness, longevity, and divine protection over sacred Buddhist sites. Generally, Nagas appear in three forms: a snake with multiple heads—commonly three, five, seven, or nine; a half-human, half-serpent figure, often referred to as Naga chamlang or Naga plaeng (transformed Naga); and a human figure with a serpent hood extending from the neck and head, known as Manussanaga.

(Top) Naga stairway at Wat Phra Phutthabat Ratchaworamahawihan, Phra Phutthabat district, Saraburi province.

It is evident that the art of Naga has been incorporated as decorative elements in Buddhist contexts—Buddha images, stairways, roofs of stupas, ubosots, viharas, and other religious objects—to enhance the exquisiteness, aesthetic, value, and attractiveness. Such art clearly illustrates the significance of Naga and its role in art, serving Buddhism as both a spiritual symbol and a guardian of sacred spaces. Moreover, the belief and faith in Nagas have inspired various cultural heritage community-based products, generating sustainability and contributing to the grassroots economy tangibly.



The Naga for the People and Communities: From Belief to Products

The Phaya Naga or Naga is a legendary figure whose story has long been passed down through generations in Thai society. The tales often reflect each locality's culture, traditions, beliefs, festivals, and unique identities, including inspiring the artistic creations of local artists and scholars related to the Naga. From the original beliefs and ideas, further development has led to changes in products, creativity and services inspired by cultural tourism in regions across Thailand.

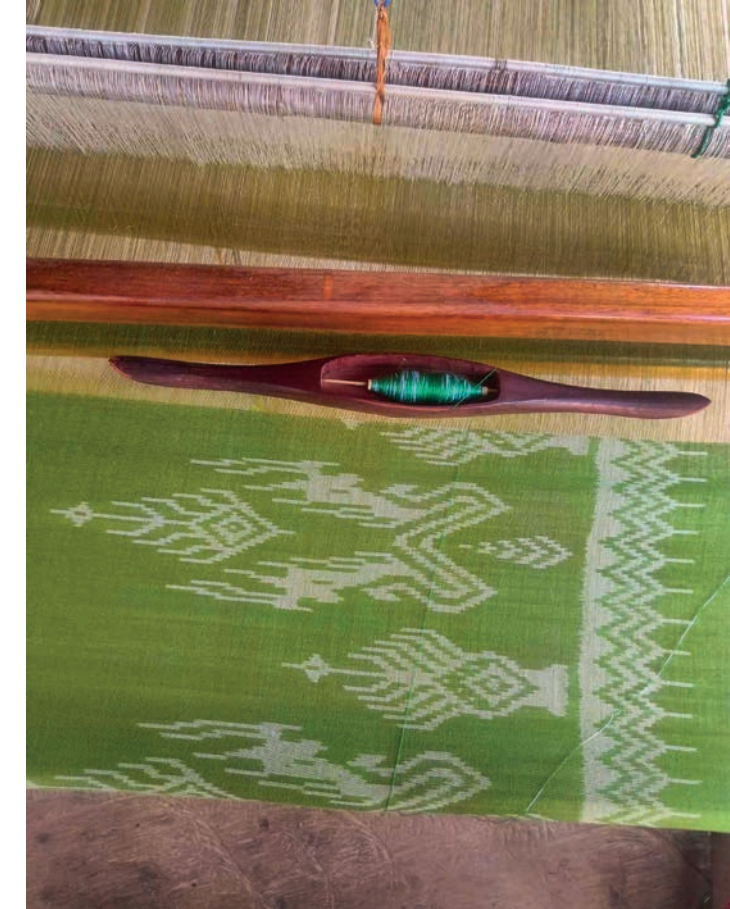
Naga is regarded as a form of cultural capital created from the local beliefs held by people in different regions and has become a sacred symbol of human-constructed beliefs. Nowadays, the worship of Naga differs from its original context. Its role and meaning have been adjusted and reinterpreted to meet the needs and satisfaction of modern people. As a result, the Naga has been transformed from a traditional belief into a commodity—becoming a cultural product and a commercial selling point. With the Naga now serving as a source of inspiration for cultural product development, supported by deep-rooted stories and faith, the local's income has been increasingly generated.

The concept of the Naga has been carried forward into contemporary creative work as a form of soft power to develop a variety of products that drive Thailand's grassroots economy. These efforts have been compiled into this book, 'NAGA for the People and Communities,' which is intended as a source of information for youth, students, and the general public.

(Left) Phaya Si Sattanakaraj Plaza, Mueang Nakhon Phanom district, Nakhon Phanom province



*(Left) Contemporary Naggie figurines are displayed alongside Buddha images on an altar.
(Right) Ready-to-wear garments featuring striking Naga patterns / Naga motifs on a weaving textile.*



This book presents the stories of people from grassroots communities who lack opportunities and rely on household occupations. However, they remain determined and are spiritually empowered by their belief and faith in the Naga. Each chapter includes inspiring stories where the Naga, as a symbol, prominently appears in human-made products that have become commercial assets. The stories consist of eight Naga-themed products (souvenirs and keepsakes) created by small yet strong entrepreneurs with determination, including Naga bai sri, Naggie coin bank, Naga ladles, Naga-themed shadow puppetry fan, glass-blown Naga, Naga-shaped fruit and vegetable carving, Naga-patterned textile and basketry, local cuisine from the Land of Naga. Additionally, there are two other Naga-themed cultural tourism sites, a tourism village featuring Naga murals and a hospital with Naga-themed painting therapy. These became powerful prototypes of transformation that can be adapted for community development in other areas through network collaboration. They also serve as an excellent case study for learning how to use cultural capital—specifically Naga beliefs—to drive meaningful change.

After reading these stories, you may wish to explore cultural capital related to mythical animal legends in your community and apply what you found interesting in this book to develop your local area into a contemporary, multi-dimensional society.



*(Hand-carved woodcraft products of master artisans,
Ban Thawai handicraft community, Chiang Mai province)*



*(Naggie, designed by the Ceramic Design Programme students,
Faculty of Architecture, Khon Kaen University)*

The Naga in Tourism and Creative Economy

In an era where local beliefs have travelled across regional boundaries and reached people across the country, tourism trends and public media—particularly platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and websites—play an important role in spreading the popularising of the Isaan or the northeastern belief in Nagas. Moreover, the presentation of ancient traditions and sacred sites across provinces where the Naga believed to have resided, along with the auspiciousness of Naga worship, have greatly impacted both local and non-local tourists’ attention in terms of Naga-related traditions, rituals, and sacred spaces.

From the economic and tourism promotion policies of the northeastern provinces, cultural capitals have been increasingly incorporated into various events for better value, aligning with creative economy and tourism, enabling the attraction of tourists— especially those interested in cultural tourism—to promote and position Isaan culture as a key selling point. Additionally, the value-adding process of tourism that stems from creativity and the local narratives surrounding the Naga used to support tourism and economic value is particularly important to event organisers as Isaan does not possess outstanding natural capital like some other regions. The development policy of Isaan must, therefore, rely more on cultural capital.



Tourism in the upper northeastern region nowadays often relates to tourism related to the Naga in various forms, as evident in cultural tourism promoted at the Phaya Si Sattanakharat—a new landmark in Nakhon Phanom province. In addition, it can be seen that both ancient legends and modern tales are often used to promote tourism. The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has utilised the story of the Naga as a ‘selling point’ to promote tourism in the northeastern region through publicity at the annual Thai Tourism Festival or promoting rituals, traditional events, or Naga-related tourist attractions.

(Top) Buddhist devotees gather to pray and make wishes as they await the Naga fireball phenomenon along the Mekong River in Nong Khai province.

In addition, merit-making tourism has become increasingly popular in the era that Naga became the trend in Thai society. This has led to the emergence of cultural tourism linked to sacred sites rooted in local Naga legends and newly created stories. Examples include the case of Kham Chanod in Udon Thani province and Tham Naga cave, the Land of Nagas in Bueng Kan province. This approach transforms local areas connected to Naga legends or narratives into cultural tourism destinations, aligning with the concept of the creative economy where culture is turned into a product. These ‘Naga-trail tourism’ sites were especially prominent in 2024, which was the year of the dragon—or the great serpent, as the sites have been popular among tourists who have great faith in the Naga.



The Influence of Naga in Promoting Cultural Tourism

The Lhai Reau Faii Festival

It is believed that when the Lord Buddha went down to preach to the Naga king in the underworld, before returning, the Naga asked him to leave his footprint on the bank of the Narmada River as a token to revere and worship. The Lhai Reau Faii, or illuminated boat procession tradition, is thus a form of paying homage to the Buddha's footprint by both humans and celestial beings alongside the Naga.

This festival is prominent in the northeastern region, particularly in Nakhon Phanom province. The festival is considered a national-level event, celebrated on the 15th of the waxing moon of the 11th lunar month, the Ok Phansa day (the end of the Buddhist Lent). According to Buddhist belief, the Buddha descended from Tavatimsa Heaven after having spent the Lenten period on this day and performed a miracle by opening the world, called Lokavivana, which means he performed a miraculous event, Lokavivarana or Triple World Revelation, allowing all beings of all realm—Nagas, ogres, humans, deities, demons, and Brahmas—to see each other with their naked eyes. So that all the beings can gather to pay majestic homage, offering flowers, perfumeries, incense, and various types of lanterns.

The illuminated boat procession festival symbolises the acceptance and respect of Buddhism by the people of this region. Even the Naga, who used to be the mighty ruler, recognised the Buddha and became his devoted followers—undertaking the responsibility of protecting sacred spaces and relics central to Buddhism.

The Ok Phansa and the Bang Faii Naga Festival of Mueang Nong Khai

The Ok Phansa festival in Nong Khai province is considered a traditional merit-making event in the Heet Sib Ed, similar to Nakhon Phanom province. The festival is a community religious event that involves rituals venerating sacred entities of the Mekong River by lighting incense and candles and placing them in krathong (floating offerings) or small illuminated boats.

Recently, the Municipality of Nong Khai has transformed and enlarged the festival, mainly due to national and provincial policies to promote tourism. The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has started taking a more active role in public relations. As a result, the festival has grown in scale and diversity, particularly the light-and-sound Legend of the Bang Faii Naga Festival (Naga Fireballs Festival) show, which gained immense interest among locals while becoming the key highlight of the Ok Phansa festival, increasing the significant number of tourists and boosted the local economy. Therefore, the Naga has genuinely become a generator of community development.

*(Left) The Illuminated Boat Procession Festival, Nakhon Phanom province /
The vibrant night scene of the Ok Phansa and the Bang Faii Naga Festival, Nong Khai province
(Right) Tourists securing their spots along the banks of the Mekong River in anticipation
of witnessing the miraculous Naga Fireball Phenomenon in Nong Khai province*

*(Tham Naga cave, Bueng Khong Long district,
Bueng Kan province)*

Naga in Northeastern Thailand





The Naga in various tourist destinations, especially the provinces along the Mekong River, represents a cultural element that holds a strong influence on the local communities. Stories of Naga are deeply embedded in their way of life, beliefs, rituals, traditions, architecture, paintings, etc. Nowadays, the belief in the sacred Naga in this region has become increasingly popular, and worship is growing. Spiritual tourists from across the country travel to pay homage in various worshipping sites, such as Tham Naga cave in Bueng Kan province, Phraya Sri Satta Nakaraj in Nakhon Phanom province, Por Pu Sri Suttho at Kham Chanod in Udon Thani province, Wat Roi Phra Phutthabat Phu Manorom in Mukdahan province, Wat Phra That Nong Bua, Ubon Ratchathani province.

The Naga clearly plays an integral role in Isaan folklore. The people and communities along the Mekong River believe the movements of the Naga created the river itself. Even the legend of the Naga fireballs tells the story of the overjoyed Naga who lit and released glowing fireballs to honour the Buddha when he descended from the Tavatimsa Heaven on Ok Phansa day. This miraculous natural phenomenon has then become an annual tradition.

(Top) Kham Chanod Forest, Wang Phaya Naga, Ban Dung district, Udon Thani province



In the era of tourism, Naga has been commercialised, and many provinces in the Isaan region have supported traditional festivals. This ‘NAGA for the People and Communities’ book presents stories of Thailand’s promotion of soft power on the global stage in the areas of cuisine, arts and culture, and tourism—especially the development of local community museums and the creation of grassroots economies through the integration of design and aesthetic sensibilities into community development. This initiative—led by the Ministry of Interior through the BWR model, pronounced baworn (derived from baan for the community, wat for the temple, and rachakarn for the government)—employs Naga beliefs as the foundation for communication in both contemporary and commercial contexts. It began with a single house in a remote agricultural village that was transformed into a modern space decorated with Naga murals, which later became the centre of a local network and served as a prototype for the development of the entire village. Today, more than 100 Naga paintings can be found throughout its 45 households, making it renowned as the world’s only Naga mural village and attracting both Thai and international tourists to check in and experience the culture.

*(Left) Phaya Si Sattanakharat, Mueang Nakhon Phanom district, Nakhon Phanom province
(Right) Wat Phra That Nong Bua, Mueang Ubon Ratchathani district, Ubon Ratchathani province*

When tourists visit the area, it generates income, creates jobs, and stimulates income. Naga-themed products, therefore, were designed and developed to suit contemporary tastes and meet consumer demands, including the Naga bai sri for tourists who want to worship the Naga. The bai sri is contemporary and uses the signature colours of Bueng Kan province and So Phisai district, purple and green. The bai sri arrangements are further distinguished by using the ban mai ru roi flowers (globe amaranth flower) to furnish a distinct local identity to their design.

After offering tribute to the Naga for spiritual fulfilment, visitors are often eager to sample the local cuisine of this land of Naga. Situated along the Mekong River, which people believe to be the dwelling place of the Naga, Bueng Kan province is abundant with a variety of freshwater fish. These are usually prepared into distinctive Isaan dishes, presented in bamboo trays adorned with colourful flowers.

Once satisfied with the flavours of the region, visitors often turn to contemporary-style Naga-themed souvenirs and handicrafts to support the community. Items such as bags made from Khla (Calathea) fibres in various modern forms are growing steadily in popularity and sales. The young generations have also developed the community's weaving heritage, integrating Naga motifs embroidery onto scarves and shoulder bags. Then, an innovative collaboration emerged among local makers: Khla handbags now feature embroidered Naga-patterned textiles, a fusion that resonates strongly with the new generations. Among the most striking creations is the Naggie coin bank, which was crafted and developed by the vulnerable novice monk group under the care of a local temple to generate income in order to support the novices' lunch and educational expenses.

Another source of inspiration can be found at the Sophisai Hospital, a district hospital that was once old and worn. However, it was renovated and transformed by featuring contemporary Naga wall art throughout examination rooms, creating a new atmosphere with vibrant artwork that helps brighten the room and the mood of the patients at the same time. The murals even uplift the medical staff's working environment, showing that this government facility can truly become a place of healing and happiness.

Through a multi-dimensional and integrated approach, using the story of the Naga to drive development has also contributed to grassroots economic growth. The collaboration with the Sophisai Model network has resulted in a successful prototype of cultural capital development for tourism, where art and design have become key tools in advancing community development and reviving the life of community museums. This initiative was recognised with the 2nd runner-up prize for the ASEAN Leadership Award on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication in 2023, in the category of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) or Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).



(Left) Phaya Sri Mukda Maha Munee Neelapala Nakaraj, Wat Roi Phra Phutthabat Phu Manorum, Mueang district, Mukdahan province

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The Naga Village: Community-Based Tourism and Contemporary Community Products

The Naga Village as a Community-Based Tourism

From a quiet, remote village, where most people had to leave to earn a living elsewhere and those who remained made a modest income from agriculture, rubber tapping, or weaving sticky rice baskets that are not very profitable, a local artist—who was born and raised in the village—had the idea to return and help develop his hometown sustainably. This required the cooperation of the entire community. Starting from home improvements to enhancements of the village landscape, gradually evolving into a community-based tourism destination known as the ‘Naga Village’, gaining recognition across the country.





(Phaya Thanamula Nakaraj, the Naga guardian of those born on Friday)



Life Community Museum Buengkan

The Origin of the ‘Naga Village’

According to Mrs. Wilaiwan Na Takuatung, a resident of the village, there was a local artist who had once left home to seek opportunities and pursue education in the capital. He worked as a volunteer for the Royal Project Foundation and wanted to bring back the knowledge he had accumulated to develop his hometown in Bueng Kan province. His main occupation is designing and branding, and he has a design organisation that provides brand-building services, focusing primarily on the food, agriculture, and community-based tourism sectors. Hence, he was able to bring the expertise he had previously used for the private sector, along with his experience as a guest lecturer at universities, to contribute to his community and establish networks to drive the village’s sustainability.

Seven years ago, bringing impactful change required utilising professional expertise—the art of design. This artist wished to see the beauty of his hometown. Inspired by places he had visited and the fact that he is a brand developer, he aimed to transform the area by attracting tourists when the opportunity arose. He longed to see the smiles and laughter of the community, including the improvement in their life quality.

The first step was to gain acceptance from the local community before he could design and transform the village—as there were other people’s homes. So, the best place to begin was the family’s house. However, it wasn’t easy as his father was living there, and it wasn’t easy to convince someone from the older generation. His father constantly questioned the purpose of the changes and stated that their life was already comfortable living like this. Although there was quite a conflict on the ideas, he asked his father to let him try and was allowed to use one room as a trial space. He then began renovating the prayer room, which was the heart of the family.

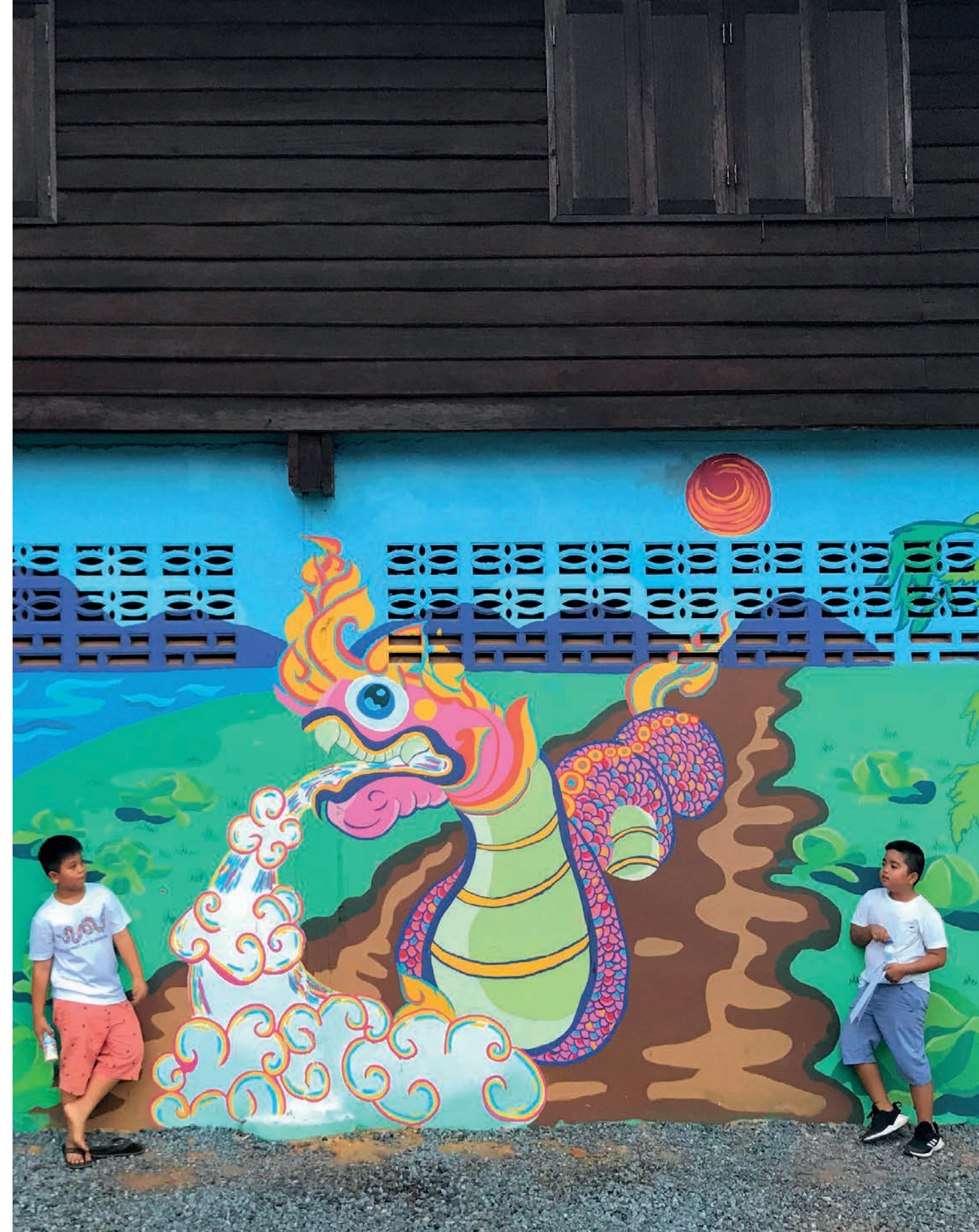
It has to be explained that the house is an 80-year-old traditional elevated wooden home, typical of the Isaan region, which become increasingly rare these days as it is harder to maintain. His father slept downstairs as he could no longer walk upstairs; thus, the upper floor was unused and had fallen into disrepair. So, he applied his design skills and beautified the upstairs prayer room. He then told me, his older sister, that if our father came to see it, I must only say it looked ‘beautiful, good, and elegant’ and cheer on it. That day, we all planned along with my friends, and when our father saw and had taken photos with it, he smiled with joy.

That was when we were allowed to do whatever we liked. This marked a significant turning point, going beyond the boundaries of the family with full support. He began rearranging and decorating the existing items by simply organising them aesthetically. There were framed portraits of King Rama IX and King Rama X in each room and corner of the house, with the overall colour scheme of natural tones enhanced with local cultural colours—purple for Bueng Kan province and green for So Phisai district.

When the house became more beautiful, neighbours from around the village came to see how a traditional wooden house could be adapted and designed into something charming. He then began helping beautify other houses and brought in Naga-themed graffiti on different surfaces, such as house walls and fences. His vision was that community development in this era must include an understanding of aesthetics and taste, as it was vital in advancing the grassroots economy and creating a more contemporary atmosphere—demonstrating a harmonious space between the old and the new.

With the cooperation of community service agencies and universities organising volunteer camps, murals of Nagas in diverse occupations representing each household were painted. Our own family’s wooden house was then named the Living Community Museum of Bueng Kan province: the inspirational centre of ‘From Local to Legacy’. This introduced something new and unique: a village filled with Naga murals, the one and only in the world. Subsequently, visitors began to come, and government agencies and academic institutions started to partner with us, resulting in an expansion of opportunities and turning the village into a model for other communities, making us a living museum that can feed the community.

(Right) The Naga mural on each house tells a unique story—like this one, showing a Naga watering a vegetable garden to reflect the family’s farming life.





“Actually, every area in Thailand still needs development. In the past, agriculture was mainly for subsistence. Still, now it must shift toward agro-tourism—like what Japan does, where farming and tourism go hand in hand. This village has embraced and demonstrated the idea by introducing agro-tourism, where locals sell local goods and food, offer homestays and beautify their homes. The concept is that every house is a living museum where visitors can experience real, local life and experienced it. This model of sustainable development has gained attention from government agencies, and the Bueng Kan Living Community Museum was awarded 2nd runner-up for the ASEAN Leadership Award on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication in the NGO/CSO category, organised by the Ministry of Interior in 2023. This approach could easily be replicated across Thailand.”

Belief in Naga

The curator of the Living Community Museum shared a view that the Naga equals development, with the key question: How come young people are visiting the area more? The answer lies in the Naga-themed art. Wherever there is art, there is a world of beauty and inspiration.

“For the people in the area, the Naga is a source of life and happiness. The village is located on a small hill, and during the rainy season, water floods the surrounding rice fields. This has made the villagers familiar with living with the water, as well as the Naga, in their beliefs. In terms of the belief in Naga in each family, they differ according to each family’s imagination. In the community, there are three styles of Naga sculptures: the Two-Sided Mekong Naga, the Three-Headed Naga, and the Seven-Clan Naga, which were created for people to worship. It is widely believed that the Naga can bring changes and happiness, and the younger generations will always connect to the Naga as it is embedded in their souls. This belief will, therefore, never fade away. Still, the real question is how do we stay in our homeland and build value and happiness? The Naga has become a spiritual force that inspires people to rise, innovate, and preserve their heritage. Without the belief in Naga, many would have left their homeland, and the area would lose its chances to grow. The Naga, to this land, thus symbolises the development and advancement of the local community.”



(Left) A traditional sticky rice barn in its original condition, and green-painted farming tools with purple flowers to give a contemporary feel at the front. On the side of the barn is graffiti of a three-eyed child and a black Naga, created by renowned street artist ALEX FACE.

‘The Naga Tourism Route’
from Tourist’s Perspectives

Asst. Prof. Dr. Sitthichai Hathachoti, Assistant to the President for Research, Innovation, and Academic Services at Kasetsart University Chalermphrakiat Sakon Nakhon Campus, shared his views on community development in creative economy tourism that research on community development—such as tourism routes design, local history study, and the Naga faith exploration—has long been ongoing in the region. He explained that in the upper part of Isaan, especially the area along the Mekong River or the Mekong River basin, there are countless Naga tourism route stories.

Today, Naga-themed spiritual tourism is increasingly popular, especially the Living Community Museum in Bueng Kan province, which uses historical stories from the past as a selling point, drawing visitors and generating local souvenirs based on their folk wisdom. The community members also actively participate in the tourism process to help generate income, create a circular economy, and improve the quality of life. Therefore, integrating research with local area development is essential, alongside the collaborative efforts between educational institutions, local communities, and the private sector, in order to drive creative economy tourism forward.

Mr. Sakdisit Buakham, Visual Arts and Design Program, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Udon Thani Rajabhat University, mentioned that in the current development of communities and grassroots economy, art has been applied to increase value of existing cultural assets to fit social contexts, changes, and technologies so that the locals can live sustainably.

In many communities, local arts are their cultural asset that has long prevailed alongside the community’s history and have been passed down through generations—whether it is traditions, beliefs, ways of life, or folk wisdom. However, these cultural capitals are not very prevalent among the new generations. Therefore, it is necessary to integrate contemporary art knowledge and apply it to local art forms, updating content and styles to better match the modern world, making them more engaging and accessible to people of all ages. This approach helps promote creative tourism by modernising traditional culture while preserving its roots. For example, the Naga has been reimagined to support community-based tourism. Traditionally, the Naga is usually seen in temples as a symbol of worship. Yet, contemporary art has transformed it into vibrant and accessible graffiti, making the Naga the symbol that represents virtue, sincerity, and friendliness.



(Assoc. Prof. Dr. Khunying Sumonta Promboon,
President of Chitralada Technology Institute
and Youth Volunteer Group)



Asst. Prof. Dr. Sitthichai Hathachoti



Regarding the role of Udon Thani Rajabhat University in community economic development, the university has been involved in promoting grassroots economics by focusing on supporting community-based tourism through creative approaches. This aligns with the university's policy, which is that it is a truly local development-oriented institution. The university has also collaborated with the Bueng Kan Living Community Museum to work on contemporary art, as it is known that this place has become a destination for international visitors who are interested in art.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Khunying Sumonta Promboon, President of Chitralada Technology Institute, shared that she had the opportunity to visit the Isaan region many decades ago. Like many other tourists, she feels a connection to the area because of its fascinating stories, particularly those that revolve around the Naga, which are closely tied to Buddhism. The strong faith in these beliefs resulted in a rich and beautiful culture, which has become one of the charms of Isaan. She views this as a creative belief that encourages people to pursue good deeds and live with meaningful purposes.

Naga: A Belief that Must be Explained

The belief in the Naga must be explained holistically. Belief systems, folklores and legends, as well as scientific explanations, must be gathered and collected to understand the question: What kind of creature is the Naga? What causes the Naga fireballs?

Dr. Kritsanapong Kiratikorn, President of Kasetsart University Council, said, "I would like to see the view of the Naga, in addition to the perspective of beliefs, through academic explanation. What is Naga in science? What is Naga in a cultural aspect? What is Naga in folklore? What is Naga in history? If we could present this through cartoons or videos for the younger generation to understand, it would be very beneficial. The Naga fireballs, for instance, are believed to be released by the Naga. However, it has been explained scientifically that it was actually ignited flammable gas emerging from the riverbed—an entirely natural phenomenon."

"It's important to explain this phenomenon because these fireballs appear during the end of Buddhist Lent, based on the full moon day on the lunar calendar. Therefore, it is possible to suggest academically that the natural phenomenon could occur due to the gravitational interactions between the Earth and the moon, causing the gas to be released. I personally would like to see the balance between storytelling, beliefs, legends, and scientific explanations as much as we could."

Facebook: Life Community Museum Bueng Kan

The Inspirational Centre of 'From Local to Legacy'.

Address: 9 Moo 7, Nong Phan Tha subdistrict, So Phisai district, Bueng Kan province 38170

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(Top Right) An ancient water well, hundreds of years old, which still bears traces of being the community's centre of life in the past.

(Bottom Left) Dr Krisanapong Kiratikorn, Chairman of the Kasetsart University Council, riding a tricycle to explore the Naga Village art exhibition.

Mr. Sakdisit Buakham



SOFT
POWER



Naga Bai Sri: Fresh Banana Leaf Handicraft

The Bai Sri is believed to have originated from Brahmanical beliefs as banana leaves symbolise purity and innocence, and the shape of the Bai Sri is modelled after Mount Meru, the residence of the god Shiva. Bai Sri arrangements in Isaan have traditionally been used in the Su Khwan (soul-calling) rituals, which are a long-standing cultural practice based on spiritual beliefs aimed at uplifting morale and wellbeing. There are various types of Bai Sri, depending on the type of ritual. For the bai sri for worshipping the Naga, the Isaan so-called ‘**Bai Sri phaya nak**’ (Naga Bai Sri), the arrangement consists of 18 cone-shaped banana leaf structures assembled at the front of the Bai Sri and stitched together crisscrossed into layers. Once completed, the arrangement is very exquisite.

(Left) The Phu Tai ethnic group prepares bai sri for visitors who come to pay homage to the Naga spirit at Wat Tham Sri Chomphu every day.



The Naga for the Community: A Tale Through the Naga Bai Sri

The year 2017 marked the beginning of cultural prosperity development at **Wat Tham Sri Chomphu**, located in **Tham Charoen sub-district, So Phisai district, Bueng Kan province**. During that time, an abbot named **Phra Khru Arunthammasunthorn** began improving the temple. He invited local residents who could craft Bai Sri to help create various types, including the **Bai Sri Phaya Nak** or Naga Bai Sri to be used as ceremonial offerings to honour Por Pu Sri Suttho Naga and Ya Sri Pathumma.

Grandma Charoen Phonsuk, now 79 years old, is a rice farmer and rubber plantation

worker, and she recalls how she first began crafting fresh banana leaf Bai Sri 7 years ago. She didn't know how to make it at all back then and had to learn through YouTube videos with great difficulty. However, she relied on her faith to drive her to persist and slowly master the skill until she became the group leader. Even now, she admits the work is still challenging as the Naga Bai Sri requires patience and delicacy. It can sometimes take 2-3 full days to finish a piece. She recalls one particularly rushed occasion when the Naga bai sri had to be completed in just one day. The 4-6 people worked continuously—not even stopping to eat.

“Those who are more skilled than others, like me, take on the more difficult parts—such as sculpting the brow ridges, lips, tongue, scales, and crest of the Naga. At this temple, there are only three people who are really skilled at making the Naga Bai Sri, while other types of Bai Sri—deities bai sri, Brahma Bai Sri, or the four-faced Brahma Bai Sri, are made by separate experts. Our team has around 20-30 members, each divided into different departments. The oldest member is in their seventies, while the youngest is in their thirties or forties.”

When asked about the income, grandma Charoen replied that she volunteered to serve the temple. What she receives is happiness, merit, and fulfilment. She knew that she did not have much to offer to the monks, so she used her physical strength and spirit to make the bai sri offerings to generate income for the temple, while her primary personal income came from weaving.

(Right) The Naga bai sri, crafted by the Phu Tai artisans, is exquisitely delicate and striking, as if the Naga had come to life.





“I’m in a Phu Tai weaving group that is responsible for production, while her children and grandchildren handle sales. Today, we came to the temple to help with the Bai Sri work, and then we returned to weaving afterwards. On Buddhist holy days, everyone in the weaving group gathers at the temple to help make Bai Sri offerings because many people come to make merit and pay respects on these days.”

Regarding her belief in the Naga, grandma Charoen said she had never personally experienced any miracles herself. However, she has seen many people come to the temple to offer Bai Sri and fulfil their vows. This means that many who came for blessings were likely successful, and miracles probably happened to them. If it weren’t true, if their illnesses didn’t heal, their business problems didn’t improve, or if debts weren’t resolved, they wouldn’t have returned.

As for herself, she intends to continue making Bai Sri for the temple until she no longer has the strength. She would like to invite everyone to visit Wat Tham Sri Chomphu. Every time you come, there will always be changes as the abbot is developing the temple delicately. She would also like tourists to go and see the community’s weaving group, which is of the Phu Tai ethnic group. They offer a variety of products for sale, including sarongs, shawls, local foods, and souvenirs made by people in their community, such as jaew bong (spicy chilli dip), kanom pun sip (steamed cake), and banana chips, as well as basketry handicrafts.

Belief in the Naga of a Pattani Woman Who Was Enchanted by the Land of the Phu Tai

Believing that the Naga beckoned her, calling her to leave her hometown in Pattani to settle in the Phu Tai region, **Kullaporn Khattiyabut** is sure that it was the Naga who brought her here. Now in her 40s, she was initially trained in home economics and worked as an administrative officer at Pattani Technical College. She is now able to make fresh banana leaf bai sri with ease after moving to be with her husband and living in So Phisai district for 6 years. However, she had never made a Naga Bai Sri before.

“My daily life now mainly revolves around helping out at the temple. Most of my time is spent crafting Bai Sri. My husband and I have rubber plantations, but we left them in the care of our younger sibling, and we chose to devote ourselves to Wat Tham Sri Chomphu. I truly love the Phu Tai culture—their dress, their lifestyle, their spirit.”

“As for my belief in the Naga, I think that if I weren’t connected to the Naga, I wouldn’t have ended up here. I truly believe that Por Pu Sri Suttho Naga called me. Even though I was living in the South, I somehow came here. I believe the Naga is real. At first, when grandma Charoen hadn’t started making Naga Bai Sri, I was the only woman working at the temple. The abbot asked me one day if I knew how to make the Naga Bai Sri, and I told him no. So he bought a Bai Sri from Kham Chanod for me to study. I wondered if I could really make it at first, but the abbot suggested that I light nine incense sticks and ask for blessings each time I worked. I then began to do so, lighting the incense and sticking it into the ground, asking Por Pu Sri Suttho

Naga for help. Making a Naga—especially the feua form (Naga movement)—with fresh banana leaves is complicated, but I could suddenly surprisingly make it. Still, I make sure to light incense and ask Por Pu every single time. That’s why I say, if I weren’t part of the Naga realm, I wouldn’t be here, serving until today.”

The Naga Is Real

Kullaporn Khattiyabut shared that she believes in the Naga—not with blind faith and not with disrespect. When she first moved here, whenever she didn’t go to the temple, she would dream of Naga, and her husband would see her making strange, snake-like movements, which frightened him deeply.

“In that dream, I felt like the lower half of me was a snake or a Naga, while the upper half remained human. My husband told me he wouldn’t let me go to the temple anymore because it scared him. The abbot at the temple was also concerned that the Naga would possess me. I had never experienced anything like this before. The abbot told me that if anything like that happened again at night, I should call him immediately, no matter how late. However, it never happened again, as I am a person with good thoughts, who does good deeds, and who never wishes to harm or envy anyone. I live on the path of merit and have no evil in my heart, so I’m not afraid of anything negative. Every time I’ve had an accident, I’ve never gotten hurt. But Pu Lod—the medium of the Naga spirit—would always feel the body pain instead of me. The abbot said that the Naga would protect me and take the impact whenever I was about to have an accident. Every time I was in an accident, Pu Lod would suffer, and the abbot would have to treat him afterwards. Everyone started telling me to please be more careful.”

The Naga has really brought life to the community; more and more devotees come to visit the temple each year, thanks to the Naga. Today, there are many visitors from different districts and provinces. Kullaporn shared that in the past, the temple would already be empty by late morning. Now, in the evening, there are still people travelling to the temple, even at 4 p.m.

Over the past 3 years, visitor numbers have continued to grow. Although Wat Tham Sri Chomphu was already known for housing a Buddha’s footprint and its annual festivals, development was still lacking. However, things began to change around 7 years ago, when the current abbot arrived and started improvements around the temple. In addition, a Naga head similar to the formations found in Tham Naka cave was recently discovered, though it hasn’t been opened to the public. This has strengthened the belief that this temple truly belongs to the realm of the Naga.

“So we have to craft various types of Bai Sri for worshippers. Namely, Khant Ha (five-tiered offering) is for honouring the abbot, while Khant Kao (nine-tiered offering) is for worshipping the highest sacred entities. If one is asking for forgiveness from the spirits, a Bai Sri pak cham—consisting of vegetarian dishes with rice in a cone and seasonal fruits—is prepared as a token of contrition. For grandeur ceremonies, elaborately decorated offerings like Khant Thep or Khant Phrom are used.”

(Right) Contemporary interpretations of the Naga-themed bai sri, crafted from fresh green banana leaves and adorned with flowers and soft purple-toned ribbons.





“We remained devoted to crafting Bai Sri to worship the sacred beings who have showered our temple with prosperity. We also have an image of Rahu, whom people come to worship every Wednesday and Saturday. Although this year is the Year of the Naga, the practice involves worshipping Rahu. This is the reason why I’m here—to guide visitors on what to do. My life revolves around the temple and my home, and I rarely go elsewhere. Before each Buddhist holy day, we begin preparing specific types of bai sri, while Khant Ha is crafted every day. We make around 50 pairs of Khant Ha, 17 pairs of Khant Kao, and 20 pairs of Khant Thep or Khant Phrom daily. There are usually 3-4 people helping to assemble each Bai Sri, each with their specific role. Some visitors who come to pay respect to the Naga are often impressed by our bai sri work and later invite me to craft their ceremonial Bai Sri at other locations as well.”

“Finally, I would like to invite everyone to visit Wat Tham Sri Chomphu, a sacred site filled with spiritual significance and objects. Here, visitors can pay homage to numerous revered figures and relics, including the Buddha’s relics, the Buddha’s footprint, and various deities such as Goddess Lakshmi and Lord Ganesha. The temple also features the Stairway to Heaven, the Naga-scale stone, a sacred lotus-shaped stupa currently under construction.”

Facebook: Wat Tham Sri Chomphu, Ban Tham Charoen, Tham Charoen subdistrict, So Phisai district, Bueng Kan province 38170 Phone: +6695 262 5542



Isaan Regional Cuisine, the Soft Power

The culinary culture of the Isaan people is remarkably unique. For example, the salty taste from nam pla ra (fermented fish sauce), the spiciness from fresh and dried chillies, and the sourness from local vegetables. Most Isaan people enjoy spicy, salty, and sour flavours, which combine into the flavour locally called zaap (intensely flavourful). Sticky rice is the staple food, and most ingredients can be harvested from nature, especially seasonal vegetables.

As a result, Isaan people tend to be healthy both physically and mentally. A local artist in Bueng Kan province has elevated traditional cuisine under the concept of **‘From Local to Legacy’**, leading to great success and received the Gourmand Awards—the so-called Oscars of the culinary world—for several consecutive years. Isaan local cuisine then became a powerful form of soft power. Tourists visiting Bueng Kan are now eager to taste the unique flavours of the cuisine that has become the cultural capital of the community.

(Left) Isaan cuisine is served in bamboo trays and charmingly decorated with colourful flowers—inviting tourists to snap photos and share on social media.

Elevating Local Cuisine: from ‘Local’ to ‘Legacy’

Arranging traditional Isaan dishes exquisitely and interestingly, even though they are the same traditional food with the same delightful taste, makes it more luxurious. It simply requires a new way of thinking and making the same old dishes look fresh and intriguing because tourists enjoy taking photos of their food before eating these days.

“The Suriya family is an old culinary family. All of our ancestors, fathers, mothers and children, everyone can cook Isaan food. The museum’s caretaker graduated with a degree in food and nutrition from Udon Thani Rajabhat University, but her true passion lies in cooking. The food here comes in several forms. First, the everyday Isaan dishes we normally eat with our family. Second, certain dishes—about 13 dishes—we have been selected and adapted as culinary tourism meals, like the ones served in the bamboo trays you see. Third, also in those bamboo trays, about 4-5 items that have been turned into processed food products and famous local souvenirs. Many tourists try to fall in love with the flavours and purchase them at home or use the delivery service. These include items such as kun chiang (Chinese sausage), sai krok Isaan (fermented Isaan-style sausage), jaew bong (chilli dip), mhum mhoo (fermented pork), and pla dad diaw (sun-dried fish), etc.”

When the artist returned to develop his hometown, he didn’t want tourists to visit just for the design of the area since that could be found anywhere. Instead, he wanted to show how the design here can contribute to transforming the grassroots economy. What he truly wishes is for visitors to experience the Isaan cuisine. Although the food might seem similar to those of others in the Isaan area, his goal was to make it truly impressive.

He grew up with traditional Isaan customs and festivals, such as the Bang Fai Festival, where long bamboo rockets are paraded and launched to pray for the rain. So, he took a large bamboo pole, halved, lined with banana leaves, and used them as a serving vessel. The flavours would still remain authentic, but the presentation was reimagined.

“There are 10 types of flowering plants grown at the Living Community Museum in shades of purple and blue—Feuang Fa (bougainvillea), Sri Trang (jacaranda), Phuang Kram (queen’s wreath), Toi Ting (torenia), Krathiam Thao (garlic vine), Bua Phan (blue water lily), Thian Yot (golden dewdrop), Chong Nang (clock vine), Phayap Mok (mistflower), and wisteria. When visitors dine in, they will experience the authentic flavours with the delicate touch of seasonal floral decorations. Those who stay overnight at a local’s homestay or resort can also experience a gorgeous—and delicious—traditional breakfast set.”

“He incorporates the art of designing to let tourists appreciate the aesthetic, but behind the scenes, it is the community that benefits. These delicious dishes come from home kitchens, and the cook must purchase vegetables, fish, and other ingredients from nearby local sources. When tourists enjoy a meal, the income also flows directly to each household in the community. This is a truly inclusive form of income distribution.”

(Right) A well-preserved original Isaan kitchen that has been in use for over 70 years is now adorned with artistic touches.





This village places high importance on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), partly because of the artist from Bueng Kan, who has spent over 25 years working as a volunteer with the Royal Project Foundation. This commitment continues to this day.

He has been working on his local Isaan cuisine since he recently received the prestigious Gourmand Awards (the Oscars of the food world) for a regional dish from Sakon Nakhon province. The award was for ‘Design of the World’, a category typically dominated by French or Italian cuisine. Still, it was the local Isaan food that took centre stage this time. This aligns perfectly with the Thai government’s current promotion of soft power through the ‘5Fs’ strategy, with the first being ‘Food’.

The broader concept of food in Thailand goes beyond just Thai cuisine—it includes local foods from all regions across Thailand. When we speak of ‘Thai food’, most people tend to think of dishes from the Central region. At the same time, regional cuisine has yet to be truly recognised as a national agenda.

Therefore, when he won the Gourmand World Award for regional food, he wanted to send a message to the local development agencies, community development organisations, and other stakeholders to take after his model and take inspiration back to their own localities to start managing their areas creatively. Every village, sub-district, and province already has its native food. What’s needed is to design and present it with a unique local identity that makes people recognise and want to visit. When tourists do come, they are ready to spend, and this helps circulate income within the community. Especially now, with community-based tourism becoming increasingly popular, tourists are invited to visit each region through its distinct flavours of cuisine.

From his perspective, taking community products to events outside the village is not a sustainable approach, and the community is not familiar with it. Instead, developing the local area into a community-based tourist destination seems to meet the lifestyle better. It allows people to stay in their homes and enhance their surroundings for visitors who come to appreciate the value of the local landscape. Tourists get to see art in the community and visit over 70-year-old traditional Isaan wooden houses, with some converted into contemporary community museums where the old and the new coexist harmoniously. These spaces also serve as development centres under the Sophisai Model.

Importantly, visitors can enjoy beautifully presented, unique local Isaan cuisine and purchase processed food products to take home as souvenirs. While residents may not directly benefit from the artistic designs scattered throughout the village, those artworks help draw tourists in to take photos and explore the area, which benefits villagers in the next step—earning income through the sale of local dishes and ingredients. This is, hence, the very thing that brings people together to develop their hometown.

(Left) A local Isaan food set designed in harmony with nature, using locally sourced natural materials from the surrounding area.



Some households that do not grow vegetables still contribute through other local products, ranging from household items to woven products made from the Khla plant. For example, whenever we eat a dish, the containers used for serving side vegetables and condiments are often handwoven from local plants like Khla. Tourists who see and admire these items usually purchase them to take home. This reflects the impact of thoughtful design that meets all aspects while sustaining the community.

Cooking with Soul: The Taste That Builds a Sustainable Community

The deliciousness that visitors experience when eating at the **Life Community Museum** is the charm and culinary touch of Wang, Narisara Wongphumi, the museum’s caretaker. She graduated in Home Economics from Udon Thani Rajabhat University, which is one of the final classes of the programme. Then, she opened a restaurant and joined local politics in 1995, becoming a member of the Nong Khai Provincial Council back when Bueng Kan was still part of Nong Khai province. Nowadays, she is no longer involved in politics, and she finds fulfilment in cooking, taking care of visitors, and doing a self-sufficient small-scale sustainable farm.

(Top) A traditional breakfast set for alms offering, reflecting a focus on preservation through simplicity, spirituality, and nature



(Wang – Narisara Wongphumi, chef of the museum)



(Mekong River fish: a raw ingredient of Isaan local cuisine and a powerful form of Soft Power)



“In our family, homecooked meals have always been part of daily life—and the way of life of the community. When I went to study to become a teacher, I passed the entrance exam specialising in Home Economics, focusing on food and nutrition. I used what I learned to teach local housewives, helping women build careers and passing on knowledge to the community.”

“Once we established the Living Community Museum, whenever guests come to visit, we all help prepare local dishes to welcome them, with the recipes passed down from my mother. Many people say the food tastes wonderful, and some ask how I learned to cook. I just tell them it comes from the heart, and I’ve also trained in Home Economics, so I have a solid foundation in things like ingredient hygiene, colour, flavour, food preservation, and product packaging.”

Meal served on bamboo tray is one of the highlight dishes. The main reason is that this area is located right by the Mekong River, so it makes perfect sense to use locally sourced natural freshwater fish as an ingredient. Fish such as Pla Khang (Giant Barb), Pla Buek (Mekong Giant Catfish), and Pla Khae (Striped Catfish) are used to make dishes like tom yam pla (spicy fish soup), larb fish (spicy minced fish salad), and hor mok pla (steamed fish curry loaf). Each catch is impressively huge, with enough meat to last for days.



SOFT POWER

“After we clean and cut the fish, we use the flesh to make larb, while the fatty, tender, and flavourful parts are used to make hor mok pla. The bones, head, and spine are used to make soups and let nothing go to waste.

Other dishes from our family recipes—such as sai krok Isaan, kun chiang, and mhum mhoo—are all served neatly on bamboo trays. We also include dishes we’ve taught local women to make, like jaew pla daeg (jaew bong) and pla tor thaew (sun-dried small fish can be eaten whole).”

“Alongside are the classics like som tam (papaya salad) and jaew pla daeg, served with fresh and steamed greens, along with both black and white sticky rice. Desserts are kept simple, using the available ingredients —such as boiled taro, boiled sweet potatoes, and seasonal fruits. The bamboo trays are then decorated with home-grown edible flowers.”

These days, when a group of visitors book a visit to the museum, Narissara pauses her social and volunteer work to help at the site. She finds joy in seeing guests enjoy their meals. The ingredients used in the dishes come directly from the community because many locals grow vegetables for their consumption or sell them at the local market. Narissara’s homecooked meals help generate a circular economy within her village and nearby communities— a true example of how to create happiness and a sustainable society.

Facebook: Souvenirs and Food Products of Bueng Kan Province

Address: 9 Moo 7, Nong Phan Tha subdistrict, So Phisai district, Bueng Kan province 38170 Phone: +6686 229 7626



Handwoven Textiles and Khla Handicrafts Nurturing Income in the Community

The way of life in the Mekong River basin revolves around the belief in Naga, instilled from childhood into adulthood, as Naga symbolises good fortune along the Mekong. With the presence of the Bueng Kan Living Community Museum, many distinctive local products have been created. One standout creation is the clothing product design of Kai Tock, which incorporates Naga motifs into various products such as T-shirts, shoulder bags, and embroidered Naga-patterned satchels. People of all genders and ages widely love these lovely contemporary designs.

In addition, the community has elevated the value of their kratip khao, a traditional woven sticky rice basketry container made from the Khla plant, turning them into commercial products. These allow families to live comfortably, eat well, and wake up each day with smiles—all while staying together at home without having to go to work elsewhere, as was often the case in the past.

(Left) A stylish Naga-patterned shoulder bag, a modernised community product made from Khla that people take great pride in.

(Right) Face masks made from handwoven community fabrics, embroidered with contemporary Naga motifs.

What is Kaitock Handicraft?

Sureerat Sripthrom explained that ‘**Kaitock**’ is the nickname given to her by her parents. So when she started her own shop, she felt that using this name would be auspicious. As for the craft, she began it in 2016. She used to work a full-time job in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya province. But after having a child, she didn’t want to burden her ageing parents with raising the baby alone. So, she decided to resign and return to her hometown.

“When I returned to my home in Bueng Kan, I couldn’t just sit back and do nothing because I used to work. While the local community is rather desolate and most people worked as hired rubber tappers, I started to think perhaps I could help the villagers with varied work experience, such as introducing supplementary jobs that would help generate income for the villagers.”

She already has an interest in handicrafts and often learns new skills from YouTube. The first time she made a craft, she invested just a little bit over 1,000 baht and earned a profit of 4,000 baht. That was when she realised this path would go well, so she gathered people in the community who had similar interests and skills to form a crafting group. Today, the group has seven members. She not only crafts the product but also continues learning how to manage people and tasks, recognising that each person has their own strengths and identifying who is suited to which tasks.

Handicrafts from the Mekong River Basin

The signature of Kaitock’s craft lies in its inspiration drawn from surrounding arts. For example, fish that are abundant in the Mekong River and the cultural belief in Naga can be embroidered onto a design. Products include embroidered Naga-patterned bags, Naga-patterned T-shirts, Naga-patterned face masks, Pla Buek keychains, and grilled fish keychains, among others.

“We want to connect our works with the story of the Mekong River, which flows through six countries—China, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, and Cambodia. So, I took that fact and made it into six fish. In Bueng Kan, one of the local dishes is grilled fish clamped between bamboo sticks, so we made the six-grilled fish keychain. This creation was even showcased at the APEC Summit in 2022. We designed all the work ourselves, and after the people in the community recognised us, some invited us to design other products. I even got to design the products for Mueang Boran (Ancient City) in Samut Prakan.”

Currently, members of the craft group, who originally worked as rubber tappers, still work their primary jobs. But during the off-season, when tapping isn’t possible, they turn to craft-making as a supplementary source of income, which provides the family financial stability and helps improve their quality of life.



(Sureerat Sripthrom in the green shirt and Supawadee Saengchampa in the purple shirt discussed how to make Khla plant bags and embroider the Naga on textiles to create collaborative souvenirs.)



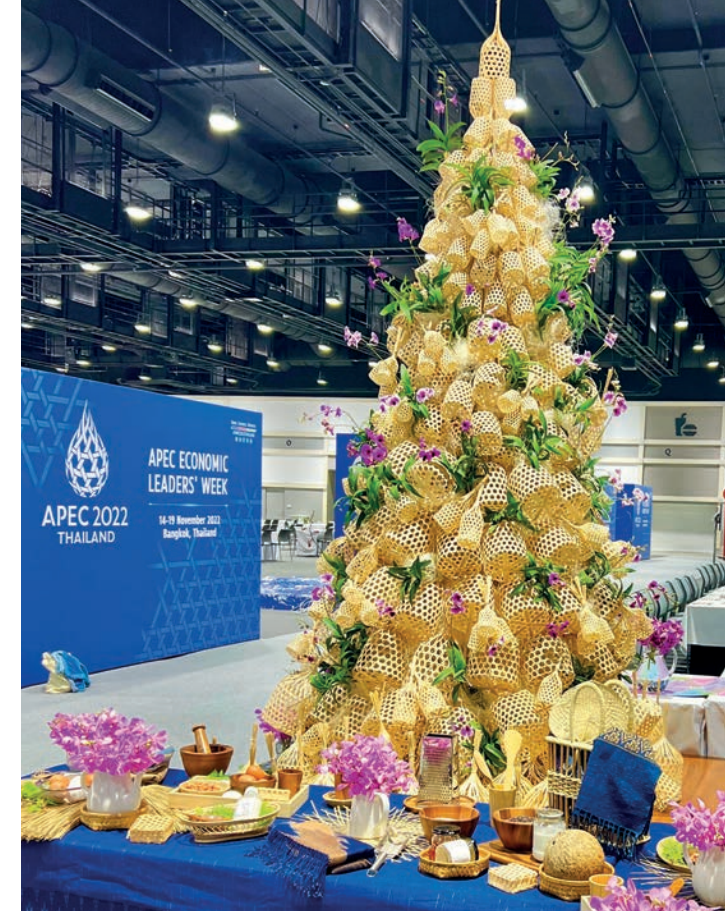
Belief in Naga

For Kaitock-Sureerat, just thinking about it gives her goosebumps. She lived with her grandmother in a house by the Mekong since childhood and grew up hearing stories about the Naga fireballs. In her first few years as a craftsperson, her skills were not yet advanced; she once received an order to craft a product related to the Naga. She, at first, couldn't come up with an idea.

“When I couldn't come up with inspiration, I then meditated and prayed to the Naga that I am a descendant of the Naga lineage, and I have always committed to the Buddhism five precepts, so please guide me, so that I may successfully create a Naga-themed craft. I went to bed after the meditation—and that night, I dreamed of a Naga in the Mekong River. In the dream, I saw elders who had passed away standing by the riverbank, so I asked why they were there. They replied that they were there to see the Naga and pointed it out to the Naga, prompting me to look. I looked down the river and saw a white Naga appear in the middle of the Mekong River. After I woke up, I wondered why I had such a dream and whether this was the answer to my prayer. That was when an idea struck. I decided to design a satchel with a white-stitched Naga, and that became my very first craft. From that moment on, I have always believed and prayed to the Naga; whether in terms of luck, fortune, or anything, it would always come true.”

(Bottom Left) Khla, a local plant of Bueng Kan province, is used in traditional basketry to create local souvenir products.

(Right) Handicrafts from Bueng Kan province were displayed as part of the exhibit at the APEC Summit in early 2022.



Earlier, in 2023, the founder of the Bueng Kan Living Community Museum offered guidance on textile weaving. As Bueng Kan is located along the Mekong River, it inspired the creation of handwoven textiles featuring Naga motifs. Stories of the legendary serpent, such as Pu Aue Lue Naga and the white Naga from a dream, were woven into new patterns and named Naka Faowsap (Naga guarding the treasure) pattern and Nakapuja pattern, a design completed on the day of Magha Puja day. These Naga patterns were later embroidered onto satchels and T-shirts, becoming community products that serve as soft power, suiting people of all genders and ages.

During the COVID-19 outbreak, our community began sewing face masks embroidered with Naga motifs, creating something new for people. The designs stood out for their local charm and identity. If people see the potential in this craft and recognise the income it generates, it could inspire participation and extend opportunities to neighbouring villages. This would be a positive sign for the country’s economy.

Lastly, she hopes that government agencies will help drive forward what she and the community have been doing, whether through marketing support or promoting local craft products. Even though the craft group is small, it plays a vital foundation role in generating income within the community and truly supporting grassroots economic development. Most importantly, it allows people to remain close to their families while earning a living.

Facebook: Kaitock Idea Craft Studio
Address: 177 Moo 11, Hokham subdistrict, Mueang Bueng Kan district, Bueng Kan province 38000 Phone: +6685 189 6303

Khla and the Art of Basketry

First of all, let’s get to know the Khla plant or Calathea. It’s a soft-wood plant with long green segmented stalks that grow in clusters. Thriving in lowland areas with high humidity, Khla typically grows to about 1-2 metres. Nowadays, it is commonly used in weaving sticky rice containers, replacing bamboo—which is more prone to mould. At the same time, Khla is more durable, less likely to become brittle or catch mould when exposed to moisture, and even retains heat longer than bamboo.

Supawadee Saengchampa, the owner of the Contemporary Khla Community Museum, shares that she has an interest in weaving and the Khla plant, which can be typically found in the local area. Working on something she loves and gradually developing new product designs brings her joy. She feels even more delighted when tourists visit and bring her fresh ideas. She has now converted her home into a shop to display Khla basketry for visitors, turning it into a source of income. She finds happiness in working from home and witnessing the growth of her own community, helping each other develop their hometown into a community-based tourist destination. This area has always been attracting visitors, drawn by faith in the legend of the Naga, to come to explore.

Facebook: Contemporary Khla Community Museum
Address: 160 Moo 11, Nong Phan Tha subdistrict, So Phisai district, Bueng Kan province 38170 Phone: +6698 194 5581





*(Jintana Wattanapoom,
the owner of the Ton Khla
Community Museum)*

Jintana Wattanapoom, the owner of the Ton Khla Community Museum, shares that she has been weaving Kratib Khao (sticky rice basketry container) for 5-6 years to sell to tourists visiting the Naga Village. Moreover, the Bueng Kan Living Community Museum has inspired many locals to form their careers and income, thanks to the guidance of the museum’s founder.

“Our very first product is a Khla sticky rice container; then, we expanded to include bags, lamps, and household items like baskets for temple offerings and trays for fruits and vegetables. We originally sold our rice container through middlemen. Still, they often suppressed us on pricing—we asked for 50 baht, they would bargain down to 35 baht. Now that more opportunities have opened up, we are not relying solely on middlemen; villagers can sell ones with comprehensive and delicate designs at better prices, around 200-300 baht.”

“There aren’t many rubber plantations in our village, so making sticky rice containers is our main occupation. People have started planting more Khla as raw material for the containers. Neighbouring villages then support and grow Khla to sell them to us. In the past, Khla used to cost only 2 baht per kilogram, but now the price has increased to 6 baht. This has encouraged people to grow them seriously. Earlier, people would harvest them from streams and marshes, but with the growing demand, people had to purchase them. The increasing demand, thus, has led to a new career—Khla cultivation.”

This circumstance happened as a result of the rising popularity of Khla sticky rice containers and other community products made from Khla. What was once a roadside plant has now become an economic crop that villagers are now cultivating. Nowadays, the **Processed Khla Products Community Enterprise** has 11 members, ranging in age from 30 to 57 years old.

“In the past, our grandparents also wove sticky rice containers, but the income was so low that it was not enough to make a living. I had to leave and seek work elsewhere, often living paycheck to paycheck. Eventually, I entered the food industry, starting as a kitchen assistant due to my passion for cooking and food. I later opened a restaurant named ‘03 Rim Khong’ in Chonburi province, which was very successful. After my husband fell ill, I then decided to close the business and return to my hometown in So Phisai District. Once my husband recovered, I reopened a restaurant in the hometown.”

“During the launch of the Living Community Museum and the development of the Naga Village, we saw luxury cars we had never seen before passing through our village regularly. Tourists and tour buses started to visit more often, giving us the opportunity to sell Khla sticky rice containers and Khla handwoven bags, which brought us a steady income. On the launch day alone, we made as much as 70,000 baht from sales. Thus, I truly see the museum founder brought prosperity to our village. Whenever they recommend joining an event, we always accept.”

“Another positive change is to the run-down wooden house we inherited from our grandparents, which we converted into a restaurant. When the museum founder saw the condition, they advised us to renovate. We removed the metal sheets that enclosed the house and restored—while preserving—the original character by only repainting the house and planting trees and flowers around it. The ground floor is now both a restaurant and a shop selling Khla products.”

“The government agencies also have stepped up to support us, and tourists continue to visit regularly. Many of them were very impressed by how beautiful the house was, with plenty of comfortable seating—quite different from the past when it was hot and bare. My husband, who is skilled in carpentry, also helped improve the house, making it more liveable. This has allowed



our family to live happily at home while earning an income. Most importantly, it brought our home back to life, making us able to live more comfortably—compared to the past, when every breath felt heavy and money was tight. Villagers are happier because there’s better cash flow, and our village is no longer quiet—tourists visit all the time.”

“Whenever there’s an order, everyone in our group gathers to help with the work. Among all the woven products, the sticky rice container is really the star. Lately, we’ve been fortunate to be recognised by various universities. They visit our community and help us develop and improve numerous kinds of basketry, which has made learning fun for our group, even though most of us are already in our senior years. Besides, our woven Khla bags have now collaborated with the KaiTock Craft. Together, we created a new product—Khla bag with Naga embroidery—bringing something fresh and unique to our community.”

Jintana continued by saying that most of her siblings are also involved in Khla handicrafts. In her neighbourhood, aside from herself, her younger sister, Suphawadee Saengchampa, is also a Khla craftsperson. She concluded with pride that she feels fortunate to have had the chance to return and develop her hometown, providing jobs and livelihoods. She now shares these stories with tourists and has opened her home as a community learning centre, serving as a trainer for other interested communities.

Facebook: Ton Khla Community Museum

Address: 106 Moo 11, Nong Phan Tha subdistrict, So Phisai district, Bueng Kan province 38170 Phone: +6698 613 4641





Naggie: Naga-themed Coin Bank, the Meditation Practice and Income for Young Novice Monks

The Naggie coin bank is a project initiated by **Phra Maha Srayut Akkhadhammo**, the assistant abbot of **Wat Sri Samakkhi Tham**, who aspired to create a commemorative product related to the Naga of Bueng Kan Province, hence, the name. Naggie is a little Naga with an inspiring story derived from the Life of the Buddha, transformed into a sculpture representing faith. It is also part of the **Naga for the People and Communities** project.

Naggie's first debut was in 2023 at the 12th-anniversary celebration of the establishment of Bueng Kan Province as a creative effort of young novice monks. The playful Naggie coin banks are sold to raise funds for meals, tuition fees, and other educational expenses for novices currently studying at Maha Chulalongkorn Rajavidyalaya University (Nong Khai campus).

Phra Ajarn Jeng, or Phra Maha Srayut Akkhadhammo, shared that Wat Sri Samakkhi Tham used to be just an ordinary rural temple with the highest number of monks and novices in the province, around 30-40. However, it was still relatively unknown, even among people within the province.

“I used to make various coin banks, such as Doraemon and other cartoon characters, as a giveaway for children attending the moral camps held at the temple. I must say that the condition of the temple back then was simple, like any rural temple. There were only about 7-8 restrooms, which were barely enough for everyone. Still, there were many monks and novices because the temple served as a school for Buddhist scripture studies.”

“Most of the children came from low-income families. Some had parents struggling with drug addiction; others had parents working in other provinces, leaving them with their grandparents, resulting in limited educational opportunities. I would take those children to ordain as monks to give them the chance to study. They are both children from the local area as well as other districts and provinces. The students originate farthest from Surin, Amnat Charoen, and Yasothon provinces. I had to pick them up himself, and on some occasions, I even had to go to the police station because the grandmother didn’t want the child to ordain—she wanted him to work in a rubber plantation—but luckily, the child wanted to study.”

Currently, the youngest novice is 13 years old, studying in matthayom 1 (Grade 7), excluding the sangkalee or temple boy, who is 7 years old and studying in prathom 2 (Grade 2) and not yet eligible for ordination. Phra Ajarn Jeng said that they have only adopted temple boys in the past 2 years. There were none before, but because the family of those boys had severe problems and he felt compassion for the children, he allowed them to live at the temple as a temple boy. Phra Ajarn has been caring for novices for 13 years and organises various activities related to Buddhism, such as Sunday Buddhist school, which has been held for 8 years.

“Lately, more and more families have been facing serious issues. Some have contacted me and asked me to take in the children to ordain as a novice—or even just a temple boy—because their fathers are drug addicts and abuse them daily, so I did. Now, the temple is home to 20 novices and six temple boys, and there is still room to accommodate more, as the current facilities could be able to support around 40 children. Every February, parents start to reach out, asking to send their children to ordain for 10–20 days during the school break. The temple also welcomes novices joining the summer ordination program, as well as those who wish to stay longer, of course.”

The Origin of Naggie

In early 2023, Phra Maha Srayut Akkhadhammo, the assistant abbot of Wat Sri Samakkhitham, found himself caring for an increasing number of young novices and temple boys, and so did the responsibilities along with miscellaneous expenses such as food and education.

“I then consulted with a local designer of Bueng Kan province to seek advice and feedback. As I already had skills in making coin banks, I wanted to launch a coin bank pha pa (donation campaign). The designer suggested that instead of making ordinary coin banks, why not create something inspired by the Naga? That became the beginning of the Naggie coin bank project.”

(Right) The novice monk with the Naggie coin bank and Naggie garden sculpture.





“When I decided on the theme of Naga, at first, I didn’t know what kind of design to go for. After all, Naga comes in many forms. So, I asked the novices to draw their imagination of a Naga on a paper. All of them drew a long, serpent-like Naga but one. That novice drew a Naga on a vertically oriented sheet with a prominent head and a short tail instead. Seeing that sketch, I knew this might be the one. I then took the drawing to the local designer for suggestions and feedback. After several revisions, we finalised the design and got the beloved Naggie we see today.”

“I put up a sign explaining the concept behind Naggie, **the world’s first little Naga, with a story that beautifully weaves the past and present together in a tangible and contemporary form.** Naggie, the Little Naga, was inspired by a story about the three Kassapa ascetics in the Buddhist scriptures. According to the narrative, the Buddha once sought shelter at the hermitage of the three Kassapa brothers, where the eldest brother had been keeping a fierce Naga in the fire shrine. Whenever wandering ascetics came to stay, the brothers would send them to sleep in that shrine. Inevitably, the Naga would either attack them with its venom or frighten them into fleeing. When the Buddha arrived and requested shelter, they, too, sent him to the fire shrine. But instead, the fierce Naga was subdued by the Buddha’s spiritual power. The once large and dangerous creature was transformed into a small, peaceful Naga coiled inside the Buddha’s alms bowl. This is how I connect Naggie with the ancient teachings of the Tripitaka.”

(Image) Young novice monks are focused and dedicated as they create their community product, Naggie.

“As for the present-day story, the designer invited me to participate in a Mekong River basin contemporary art exhibition in 2023, held during the anniversary celebration of Bueng Kan province. I rushed to finish crafting Naggie in time to debut it at the event. I got the provincial governor signed on the sculpture—symbolically Naggie’s birth certificate. Thus, Naggie was officially ‘born’ on 23 March, the same day as Bueng Kan province’s establishment. While the province turned 12, Naggie was just newly born. In this way, the story beautifully connects the past and the present.

How the Naggie Coin Bank Brought Change

Phra Ajarn Jeng shared that after Naggie was created, the temple underwent a noticeable transformation. Once a little-known local monastery, Wat Sri Samakkhi Tham is now become well-known. Nowadays, the temple is part of tourists’ travel routes. Study groups come for learning, and government agencies have begun making official visits to show support.

At first, he crafted the Naggie coin bank using wet cement, but now they have changed to plaster. The Ministry of Industry stepped in to support the project by sending a team of ceramic experts from Lampang province to train the young novice monks in ceramic work. Today, Naggie coin banks are produced using various materials and techniques, such as wet cement, plaster, ceramic, and fibreglass. Around 80 pieces can be made per day, all handcrafted entirely by the novice monks. The coin banks are sold or distributed through many channels, such as visiting study groups and tourists who buy them as souvenirs or when the temple receives invitations to exhibit at different events. Most recently, in March 2024, the Naggie coin bank was showcased at the Thailand Tourism Festival held at the Queen Sirikit National Convention Centre. One of the most heartening recognitions came when a royal correspondent from Channel 9 MCOT presented the Naggie coin bank as a present to Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn on 1 April 2024.

“A few days ago, a group from Rattana-wapi district in Nong Khai province (where Naga fireballs Phenomenon occurs) visited the temple. I asked how they had learned about the temple, and they said they saw it in the media. Many outlets had talked about the temple, including the NBT channel, so they followed the temple’s Facebook page and then decided to follow the Naga trail here. I have now set up a spot just to sell the Naggie coin bank at the entrance to Tham Naka cave, and the sales have been going well. The coin bank selling up to 20 pieces during holidays signifies a great success. I believe it’s even more impactful than soft power, as the change is obvious and tangible.”

In the beginning, there were only three colours of the Naggie coin bank: white, purple, and green. White symbolises religion and the pure work of the novice monks. Purple represents the provincial colour of Bueng Kan, while green signifies the province’s natural abundance, and it is the key colour of the Sophisai Model. Currently, due to the growing market demand for more variety, such as colours corresponding to the days of the week, the Naggie coin banks have seven colours available.

(Bottom Right): Phra Ajarn Jeng encourages the novice monks as they paint the Naggie coin banks. Today, the product comes in seven different colours, depending on customer preferences, and has become one of Bueng Kan province’s best-selling souvenirs.





Naggie, the adorable little Naga, has become a popular souvenir that can be used as an actual coin bank in everyday life. Some parents shared that their children now save more money than before—from just 1–2 baht a day to 7–8 baht for their little Naggie.

Phra Ajarn Jeng mentioned that the Naggie coin bank has sparked many responses. Some people said they couldn't bring themselves to actually use it as a coin bank. They set it up as a commemorative object, adorned it with flower garlands and sent photos to show the abbot how they had honoured it. Others gave the coin bank to their children to encourage saving habits. Every time their children came home from school, they would save more money than usual, as if they were excited to have their little Naggie waiting for them. One parent even messaged to say how good their children's saving habits are. In addition, tourists often buy the Naggie coin bank as souvenirs. When Phra Ajarn asked if they'd like gift boxes or tags added, many responded enthusiastically, saying it would be perfect to give as a present to elders.

Wat Sri Samakkhi Tham, once known as 'the temple next to Sri Wilai Hospital', is now widely recognised as **Wat Naggie**. Phra Ajarn Jeng remarked that the name has become so prominent that even official government letters now refer to the temple with (Wat Naggie) as a nickname after the temple's real name. It does signify true identity-building and successful branding, as the temple has become known as the birthplace of the world's first little Naga story.

For travellers following the Naga route—whether paying respects to Pu Aue Lue Naga or visiting the famous Naka cave—no trip is complete without taking home **a gift from the Mekong River, the Naggie coin bank**. So, Phra Ajarn would like to remark that if you're ever in the area, please stop by to visit or join a workshop at the temple.

When one purchases a Naggie coin bank, they not only receive the Naggie back home, but they also receive merit. For example, a 399 baht donation for a large Naggie can buy four trays of eggs for the novices. These eggs are used to prepare breakfast and lunch for the young novice monks and temple boys.

What is still needed from the government or related agencies at this time is support for the final stage of the production process. The upstream phase—the product design resonates with the market and current trends—has already been successful. The midstream phase—able to cast plaster models and create ceramic pieces—is also in place. However, the downstream phase still faces challenges, as ceramic works must be transported by vehicle to be fired at the kiln in the Ban Kut Na Kham Royal Craft Centre in Charoen Sin district, Sakon Nakhon province, due to the lack of our own ceramic kiln. If any organisation could offer support, it would be incredibly beneficial, as it would allow the production process to be completed in one place. Having a kiln would help reduce production costs, especially considering the current need to travel over 100 kilometres from the temple to the kiln. During transport, some unfired Naggie coin banks break before reaching the kiln, and some finished pieces are even damaged on the return trip. On average, about 20 pieces are lost per trip, and that still does not include the cost of ceramic firing. If the temple had its own ceramic kiln, production would become much more convenient and efficient.

Facebook: Wat Sri Samakkhi Tham Family - Bueng Kan Province

Address: Sri Wilai-Chomphu Thong Road, Sri Wilai subdistrict,

Sri Wilai district, Bueng Kan province 38210 Phone: +6686 664 2111

(Bottom Left) Naggie coin bank decorated with ribbons made from local handwoven pha khao ma (traditional Thai chequered cloth).

SOFT POWER

Sophisai: The Hospital Where Healing Meets Happiness

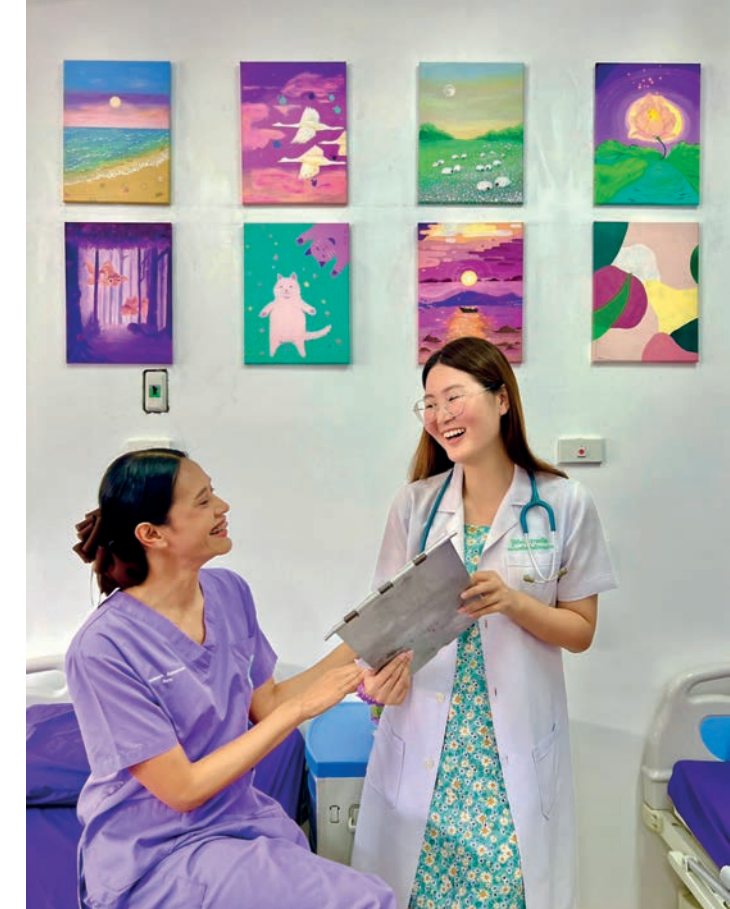
Just a touch of contemporary Naga-themed murals decorating the walls throughout the rooms of Sophisai Hospital in Bueng Kan province brings life and colour to the facility. But that's only the beginning. It is the only hospital in Thailand where staff are not required to wear white uniforms every day and are encouraged to wear traditional Thai textiles on certain days, with full cooperation from all. The hospital is also the only government-run facility that has become a destination for tourists, photographers, and healthcare professionals from across the country to study its practices as a place that makes people smile.

None of this would have been possible without **Dr. Surapong Luxsawooth, the acting director of Sophisai Hospital**, who had the vision and took real action to transform what was once a dull, worn-out medical facility into something truly uplifting.

Beyond the murals, the hospital grounds also feature a rice paddy field, Nordic-style architecture, a photogenic wooden bridge, and a five-star kitchen known as the Kitchen Studio, sharing knowledge on food and nutrition and offering a variety of dishes from Thai, Isaan, and Western cuisine.

These terrific makeovers are the effort of a 47-year-old doctor who has shown the leadership qualities of a hospital director, improving both the interior and exterior environments of the hospital. With support from local designers, food stylists, curators from the Bueng Kan Living Community Museum, and grassroots innovators, the hospital has been beautifully reimaged. It has become an outstanding example of the concept 'From Local to Legacy'.





The Transformation of the Naga, the Transformation of the Hospital

“I want people who walk into Sophisai Hospital to go... wow!” said Dr. Surapong. While the hospital’s primary mission is to promote health, rehabilitate, and treat illnesses, he believes it can do more. By incorporating art and aesthetics into this over-40-year-old district hospital, transformation becomes possible—as seen from the colourful Naga graffiti on the examination rooms, a project that began in 2019.

“At that time, I asked designers for ideas on how to bring vibrancy to the hospital, with the hospital staff supporting the idea, wanting a tasteful design with a sense of aesthetic. We focused on renovation, as built-in furniture would have cost too much, and we didn’t have the budget for that.”

(Image) Smiles of medical staff surrounded by artistic touches in their workplace



Thinking within reach was the vision shared by Dr Surapong and local contemporary artists, and that wall art could help mask the hospital’s aged appearance while adding aesthetics to the space. At that time, the designer sent a team led by **Bow-Issaree Chatdokmaiprai**, a volunteer high school student from Srinakharinwirot University Prasarnmit Demonstration School (Pathumwan), along with her friends from Bangkok Christian College and Triam Udom Suksa School—a total of 11 students—to help paint the artwork. Together, they painted various zones throughout the hospital, including the Naga X-ray area, outpatient departments, and even the Naga delivery room.

(Right) Murals of the Naga painted by volunteers have brought a sense of contemporary charm, friendliness, and warmth to the hospital.

These young volunteers, known as Eleven Volts, spent 7 days creating more than 40 Naga murals during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Today, these student volunteers have gone on to pursue their dreams—studying art, medicine, and other fields they are passionate about.

“That time, local designers invited lecturers and students from the Visual Arts and Design programme, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Udon Thani Rajabhat University, to help with the concept. Every wall art had to have graffiti-style images related to the Naga since people in the Mekong River basin believed in them. Previously, almost every wall and glass panel was covered with health education posters and announcements, which no one paid attention to. So, we cleared the walls and painted over 40 murals instead. Although I don’t have formal training in art, frequent conversations with artists and designers helped me absorb an appreciation for beauty and simplicity.”

“The designers would create the image for me to visualise and guide my thinking process, helping me gradually see through the eyes of an artist. In my role as a director, I knew I had to keep developing our organisation untiringly and welcome artists to cooperate with us. As I walked through the hospital, I began to notice when something looked too rigid or unsightly. With a touch of artistry, local patients or visitors would express their admiration, which sparks my ideas, and we gradually learn together.”





Sophisai: A Hospital Like No Other

One could say that this hospital is guided by decent administrators and visionary directors, supported by local artists who offer insights into blending traditional art with contemporary aesthetics. With the same amount of government funding but new perspectives and community collaboration, they have transformed the space. Dr Surapong believes that the time has come for public hospitals to evolve and become more aligned with the modern era.

“The transformation has turned Sophisai Hospital into the only hospital that attracts tourists and young people to sightseeing in Thailand. Study groups come not only from the Ministry of Public Health but also from the Ministry of Interior and local administrative organisations from across the country. Everyone who visits can feel the beauty we’ve carefully crafted into this place.” Dr Surapong said.

When asked what people actually come to see at the hospital, Dr Surapong proudly mentioned many things—from the Nordic-style buildings, the hospital kitchen upgraded to five-star hotel standards, the food containers, and the wall art.

“Normally, hospital kitchens are quite basic, but we asked Chef Dan (Thanasak Pahujinda) from Bangkok a favour to help us implement professional standards, essentially bringing a hotel standard into a hospital setting. Then, we worked with local designers to turn it into a stylish

(Image) Art brings joy to medical staff, while children and families enjoy creative spaces that spark the imagination.



LOCAL
สู้
เลอค่า
โรงพยาบาลใช้พิสัย

Bow—Issaree Chatdokmaiprai,
a youth volunteer



Kitchen Studio, which we also use for filming food and nutrition demonstrations. We also redesigned the food containers from stainless steel trays or plastic bags; we are now serving meals to patients in Japanese-style bento boxes.”

“Most patients don’t stay in the hospital for very long, so the meals and food presentation should be appetising. We switched to bento-style meal boxes and decorated patient rooms with wall art to make it more pleasant. For the renovation of the inpatient rooms, we received kind support from the Faculty of Architecture (Department of Integrated Product Design Innovation) of Kasetsart University, whose students painted vibrant artworks to brighten up the space. Even the people from the Sophisai Model network—Naggie by the novice monks and volunteered students—also contributed. We always welcome professional and amateur artists, including anyone interested in volunteering. This didn’t require a big budget, and we used the standard public funding allocated to all state hospitals. The key lies in how the administrators choose to manage. At Sophisai Hospital, we also emphasise that staff housing should never be neglected. It should be comfortable, with pleasant gardens and improved indoor spaces, so that staff can live and work happily. The better the workplace, the better their mental health.”

In the past, the hospital consisted only of buildings and felt relatively dry and lifeless. Therefore, trees and flowers were planted to make the environment more refreshing and inviting. Relatives visiting patients can now stroll around, enjoy therapeutic art, or take photos with the flowers while they wait, which helps bring relaxation and joy, easing their stress. Everyone deserves a little time to be together, to smile, and to share happiness in a calming and pleasant environment.

(Bottom Right) Kitchen Studio, the hospital kitchen at Sophisai Hospital. A Nordic-style building filled with smiles and joy from the medical staff.





The Sophisai Hospital Model

As mentioned earlier, Sophisai Hospital is the only hospital where staff wear traditional Thai clothing on Tuesdays and Fridays. Each department has around 4-5 different outfits.

“Other agencies and institutes have started adopting the Sophisai Hospital model. We wear traditional Thai clothing that reflects our local identity. In the past, provincial governors across the country have encouraged the wearing of Thai fabric. Still, many civil servants have been hesitant to follow through. Sophisai Hospital, however, has fully embraced it, and people have been asking me, ‘How do you manage to make all this happen?’”

I told them, “Just follow your heart; it’s like decorating your own home. Most people love checking in at cafes or fancy shops in malls, so why don’t we make our workplace feel just as cosy and inviting? That way, they wouldn’t want to go anywhere else. Here at the hospital, staff can take photos and post them every day because there are so many nice spots—like our wooden bridge or stairway to heaven. Even patients and their families take photos and post them online because they see the cheerful faces and smiles of our team. Sometimes, happiness doesn’t cost a thing.”

(Image) Medical staff at Sophisai Hospital work amidst art, smiles, and laughter, sharing joy and happiness with everyone who walks in.







“We also have rice fields, where doctors, nurses, and staff gather to cultivate rice—I join them too. Rice farming is our ancestral heritage. If we don’t grow rice, the land becomes overgrown and serves no purpose. It’s not complicated and doesn’t require much skill.”

Dr Surapong gave an example of how they transformed the hospital’s old, dull marble floor that couldn’t be polished by renewing with epoxy coating. They even printed vibrant patterns onto the concrete floors, making every photo taken there look beautiful. When people ask why Sophisai Hospital uses so much green and purple, the answer lies in our cultural identity. Purple is the colour of Bueng Kan province, while green represents Sophisai district, which also aligns with the colour of the Ministry of Public Health, making it a perfect combination.

These initiatives are all about ideas and taste. The concept is to design and transform the space so that anyone who walks in is impressed and feels this hospital is unlike any typical hospital. The doctor’s team produces videos on YouTube to share and inspire everyone. “People have asked where the hotel in our YouTube videos is. No one knows it was a hospital because we don’t want the same old image of a run-down hospital full of medicinal smell,” Dr Surapong shared.

Facebook: Sophisai Hospital

Address: Sophisai Hospital, 143 Moo 2, So Phisai subdistrict, So Phisai district, Bueng Kan province 38170 Phone: +6686 871 9050

(Image) Art is a source of morale and encouragement for both the staff and the visitors.

Naga in Northern Thailand

*Wat Sob Ruak, Chiang Saen district,
Chiang Rai province*





*Wat Phra That Chom Kittī,
Chiang Saen district,
Chiang Rai province*

*Wat Phra Chao Lan Thong,
Chiang Saen district, Chiang Rai province*

The legend associated with the Naga in the Lanna region (northern Thailand) reflects deep-rooted beliefs tied to the cultural identity of those descending from the ancient city of Yonok. According to legend, Yonok Chiang Saen was once ruled by King Singhanawat Kumar, the ancestral monarch of King Mangrai—the founder of the Lanna Kingdom. This story appears in the chronicles known as the Singhanawat or Yonok Nakhon legend. The tale tells of the tragic fate of the city when it was swallowed by the earth and vanished after its people consumed an albino eel from the Kok River, which was believed to be a manifestation of the Naga.

In the Chiang Saen district of Chiang Rai province, which lies along the Mekong River bank, many temples are adorned with intricate Naga sculptures, such as Wat Phra That Pha Ngao, Wat Phra That Chom Kittī, Wat Phra Chao Lan Thong, and Wat Sop Ruak—a popular pilgrimage site located in the famed Golden Triangle area.

From the local belief in Naga, a new craft was born. The glass-blown Naga figurines were created by the village headman's assistant, who opened his home as a production site that welcomes visiting tourists. Among the highlights is the purple Naga figurine, the provincial colour of Chiang Rai. The initiative also collaborates with a local handwoven textile community by tailoring handwoven bags for the package of the Naga figurines. This product has become part of Chiang Rai's OTOP or 'One Tambon (district), One Product' project—the fulfilled job of people who have faith and belief in the Naga.

(Top) Wat Phra That Pha Ngao, Chiang Saen district, Chiang Rai province



*(Left-Right) Wat Phra That Chom Kittī,
Chiang Saen district, Chiang Rai province*

SOFT POWER

Naga Blowglass, An OTOP Product from Chiang Rai

At the very edge of Siam in Chiang Saen, the northernmost district of Chiang Rai province, there is a legend that ‘**Naga established a human city**’. According to the tale of Singhanawat Kumar, a Naga named Phanthu Nakaraj founded a city called Nakaphanthu Singhanawat Nakhon. The story goes that before Singhanawat Kumar came to the area, it was once part of the ancient kingdom of Suvarnakhomkham. He led his people from the city of Thaithesa in search of a new place to settle. When they arrived at this land, the Naga who lived nearby learned of their arrival and offered to help establish a new settlement. The city was thus named Nakaphanthu Singhanawat Nakhon and later became known as Yonok Nakhon.

In northern Thailand, it’s common to see Naga staircases at Buddhist temples, which reflect the deep-rooted belief in **Naga and Buddhism**. Nonetheless, a fascinating glass-blown craft inspired by the Naga legend is the one on the focus this time.





Glassblowing is the art of shaping molten glass into various forms using heat and skill. It is considered a high-level craft that requires both scientific understanding and artistic sensibility, along with years of dedicated practice to master.

Nikom Inta, assistant village head of Ban Pa Kha, San Sai subdistrict, Mueang Chiang Rai district, and the district's OTOP chairman and deputy chairman, shared that he was originally from Phayao province; his journey began when he was ordained as a novice monk in Chiang Mai. During that time, he met his uncle, who worked as a glassblower. After leaving the monkhood, he went to help his uncle and began learning the art of glassblowing for a while.

"Once I had built a solid foundation, I began developing my style. I then moved to Chiang Rai, where I've been working in trading for over 20 years. In the beginning, I focused solely on glassblowing, but I was later given the opportunity by senior community leaders to serve in local administration as the assistant village head. This role allows me to ease people's troubles and bring wellbeing to the villagers. At the same time, my main occupation remains glassblowing. Whenever I'm not working on glass art, I contribute to village and community affairs. I manage my time between these two paths, both of which I deeply love."

(Left) Nikom Inta, the assistant village head of Ban Pa Kha, is known for his exceptional skill in glassblowing.





The only real requirements for glassblowing are a passion for art and a great deal of patience. This is because the work involves intense heat and the delicate process of shaping glass from a solid state to a softened form, allowing it to be transformed into various shapes, especially animals.

“For those who don’t yet know how to do it but have a real passion and interest, I can guide them. Glassblowing starts with long glass rods, which come in various sizes—

from a few millimetres to a metre long. We use a high-temperature flame to soften the glass so that it can be shaped into different forms, particularly animals. I began with glassblowing and making jewellery, such as rings and earrings. I had never made animals before, but I had seen my uncle do it, so I tried it myself. I ended up creating many kinds of animals, but what was truly satisfying were spiritual and symbolic creatures like Naga, dragons, and large serpents. I can’t speak for other artisans, but many customers choose my kind of work—especially the Naga, which consistently sells well. I think it’s due to the rich legends and folklore about Naga in Chiang Rai. The province has many temples, and if you look closely, you’ll notice intricately crafted Naga sculptures by Northern Thai masters adorning the stairways that ignite the imagination. The North is truly home to many talented local artists.”

*(Left) Traditional Naga figure, intended for worship
(Right) Contemporary and cute Naga figure, made as a collectible*





Naga Blowglass, a Popular OTOP Product

Thanks to master-level craftsmanship, the glassblowing work of Nikom Inta is delicate, lifelike, and full of movement, and it receives a significant amount of positive feedback from customers.

“Whether it’s Naga or dragon, we craft them as if they’re alive, like a Naga in water. Our first recognition came when the work was registered as an official OTOP product of the district and then of the province, meeting industrial standards. The success was a gateway into the ‘OTOP Star’ selection process, which requires strict examination and certification. We also received cultural recognition and various certificates. Most recently, we participated in a collaborative project with Japan and ranked among the top 10 out of 18 subdistricts in Northern Thailand. We were selected to participate in the KOYORI Project in Hong Kong in 2021 and won a gold medal for Creative Design. We’re very proud to be on a global-level competition, as the KOYORI Project is a collaborative initiative between Thailand and Japan, involving the Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna in Chiang Mai and Fukui University in Japan.”

“One of our first products that collaborated with the KOYORI Project was the Rhinoceros Beetles glass sculpture, which is a protected species. These creations quickly gained attention in both Thai and international markets, with consistent sales from overseas, and have become a new landmark of success for Thailand’s OTOP.”

(Top) The Inta family – the assistant village headman and his supportive wife



Eye-catching, colourful glass-blown Naga figures are popular among tourists, and customers can choose the colours as they wish.



The contemporary-style Naga has become a popular keepsake and collectable among the younger generation who are fond of art.

Belief and Faith in the Naga

Due to Chiang Rai province's location along the Mekong River, especially the Chiang Saen and Chiang Khong districts, Naga is revered as a divine figure of faith in the Mekong River basin.

"I work in glassblowing and chose to create figures of Naga, and I believe I share a spiritual connection with the Naga. I can sense certain spiritual energy, though I'm not sure if it comes from belief or devotion. Still, every time I craft the work, I feel a deep happiness, as if the Naga is supporting me and bringing me peace and joy. Before beginning each piece, I always pay homage and ask for permission, not just start on a whim. It feels as though I'm a medium, a representative, a chosen craftsman to shape the Naga for others to venerate.

Chiang Rai province, especially Chiang Saen and Chiang Khong districts, lies alongside the Mekong River. People here hold strong faith in the Naga and the river, which flows through six countries—China, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam—serving as a spiritual anchor for communities along its banks."

Glassblown figures are available in all 12 zodiac animals, yet the Naga remains the most popular. Most customers purchase them to worship. Today, his home has been opened as a local learning centre for the community and for those interested in learning about the craft. His glassblowing products are also sold at Chiang Rai's Night Bazaar and the Saturday Walking Street, starting from 4.30 PM onwards.





“Working both as an assistant village headman and as a glassblower has given me the opportunity to collaborate with the local community, especially with the traditional hand-weaving group in Ban San Sai Noi. This village is well known for its fine local textiles.”

Grandma Buhnga Jannoka, aged 77, and grandma Mon Yawichai, aged 83, have spent almost their entire lives weaving. They usually weave in purple tones, representing Chiang Rai province, and green tones, symbolising the San Sai subdistrict. Their main customers are government officials and traditional dancers. In our area, we still uphold cultural ceremonies like temple fairs, ordinations, weddings, and Poi Luang (grand celebration) festivals. These occasions often require traditional purple costumes, which makes the locally woven fabric very popular.

“For my Naga Blowglass, I use handwoven fabric from the weaving group for a bag. When tourists purchase a Naga figure, we first wrap it carefully in bubble wrap, place it in a box, and then put it in a purple fabric bag—the signature colour of our hometown. This also allows me to help promote our traditional weaving craft while fulfilling my role as assistant village headman.”

*Grandma Buhnga Channokaew and grandma Mon Yawichai, Members of the San Sai traditional weaving group
Address: 108 Moo 2, Ban San Sai Noi, San Sai subdistrict, Mueang Chiang Rai district,
Chiang Rai province 57000 Phone: +6686 187 5179*



Naga figures come in two styles: traditional designs intended for worship and contemporary versions inspired by modern art — appealing to a diverse range of customers.



Naga rings uplift confidence, from the 'Crafting Livelihoods through Faith in the Naga' event to Chiang Rai's Naga OTOP products.



“Most customers who are fond of glassblowing craft are foreigners, although it’s also popular among Thai people of all ages. Most products are in green tones, or the signature purple tones of Chiang Rai, and the local government encourages people to wear traditional clothing every Friday. Naga figures in Chiang Rai purple or purple with hints of green may attract new customer groups and expand the market as they incorporate provincial identity. To appeal to a diverse range of customers, we offer two styles of Naga figures—both traditional forms for worship, with lifelike features, and contemporary art styles that follow current trends and appeal to younger generations with their cute and charming designs.”

“Chiang Rai is both a tourist destination and a land of rivers, known for its connection to the Naga. There are both traditional Naga figures for worship and adorable collectable versions that appeal to the younger generation. These new models are particularly interesting to children. When I teach workshops for kids, they tend to be more drawn to these charming, simplified designs rather than the highly detailed traditional ones. I wish that youth and art-loving individuals will come to learn about this craft, and hopefully, the belief and faith in the Naga will continue to live on across all ages through generations.”

FB : [NK.blowglass](#)

Address: 51 Moo 8, Ban Pa Kha, San Sai subdistrict, Mueang Chiang Rai district, Chiang Rai province 57000 Phone: +6686 915 5360

(Image) Grandma Mon Yawichai (in purple) and grandma Buhnga Jannokaeo (in green)

The Thai people have long believed in Naga, as clearly evidenced in literary works since the late Sukhothai period. The Traiphum Katha (Three Worlds Treatise) mentioned that Naga belonged to the dherajchan bhumi (the realm of animals) and classifies their origins into two types: Chalachaphayanak (Naga born in water) and Thalachaphayanak (Naga born on land), as the word cha or chata means birth.

In the Ayutthaya period, stories about Naga still prevailed, appearing in important literary works such as Lilit Ongkan Chaeng Nam, Anirut Kham Chan, and even in Kap He Ruea (Royal Barge Chant), all of which included descriptions of Naga. Later in the Rattanakosin period, Naga still played an essential role in literature, such as in the Ramakien. When Indrajit—son of Thotsakan (Ravana) and Montho (Mandodari)—shot the Nagapash arrow, it transformed into numerous Naga that bit, spat venom, and bound Phra Lak (Lakshmana) and the entire army. Upon witnessing this, Phiphek informed Phra Ram (Rama), who then shot the Phayasuban arrow to summon the Garuda to seize and devour the Naga, thus resolving the situation.

The belief in Naga in Thai society has been materialised through the creation of various objects and places. Naga and Garuda are the only two creatures that Thai people have consistently used as decorative motifs on significant items. For example, in the Royal Barge Procession, a barge associated with Naga—Anantanakharaj Royal Barge—features a figurehead of Phaya Anantanakharaj, a seven-headed Naga.

Naga in Central Thailand

*Por Pu Phaya Phetchakhiri Mahamuni Sri Suttho Nakaraj,
Wat Tham Chaeng, Cha-am district, Phetchaburi province*





*Wat Don Khanak,
Mueang Nakhon Pathom district,
Nakhon Pathom province*

Beyond the ancient tales of Naga, the belief in Naga continues to play a role in the culture, traditions, and daily life of people across all regions today. It has even been expressed in cultural products. For example, Naga sculptures and imagery at various locations such as Wat Tham Chaeng in Phetchaburi, Wat Don Khanak in Nakhon Pathom, Wat Maniwong in Nakhon Nayok, Wat Pa Khlong Si in Pathum Thani, and Wat Nak Prok in Bangkok. There are also other cultural products such as inspiring Naga ladle. The ladle is a delicate carving craft by male inmates of the Nakhon Pathom Central Prison, which tells the story of Naga through a cooking utensil. In addition, unique traditional Thai fruit and vegetable carving in the form of Naga is now part of the curriculum at the Faculty of Home Economics Technology, Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep. The works are beyond beautiful and of high value. Government agencies have supported these cultural products by making the Naga ladle available for purchase and by offering fruit carving classes for students and the general public who are interested in food art and decoration.

(Top) Wat Pa Khlong Si, Nong Suea district, Pathum Thani province



*Wat Nak Prok,
Phasi Charoen district, Bangkok*



*Wat Maniwong, Mueang Nakhon Nayok
district, Nakhon Nayok province*

SOFT POWER

The Naga Ladle: Soft Power Behind the Bars

Kwanchai Santiparapop, Director of Nakhon Pathom Central Prison, said, “The most important thing for the Department of Corrections is rehabilitation, particularly through vocational training, which is one of the key tools. There are several objectives, with the first being to allow inmates to learn skills that they can use after their release. But more importantly, while still imprisoned, having no work or educational activities could lead to stress. Thus, vocational training becomes a force for mental stability that encourages mindfulness, focus, and determination to complete a task successfully. It prevents them from being distracted or having harmful thoughts that could affect themselves or prison management. This is one of the outcomes of vocational training for inmates.”





Why Naga Ladle?

How does Naga participate in vocational training for inmates, especially in prison? The Director of Nakhon Pathom Central Prison explained, “In vocational training, we have incorporated the government’s soft power policy into developing inmates’ skills by using cultural thinking processes, especially for those who believe in Naga. The prison has applied these concepts to develop inmates’ skills. For example, we have a Food Studio project that involves the belief in Naga, which influences the food preparation process.”

“The reason behind the Naga is that Thai people, especially those who follow spiritual beliefs, respect the sacredness and virtue of Naga. We chose Naga because while the inmates learn the carving process, they also get to immerse in the desire for self-improvement and the belief surrounding Naga. Carving Naga is quite delicate, and the Naga itself holds spiritual power and influence, which helps these inmates focus their minds to create the most beautiful thing—the Naga.”

(Left) Naga patterns were drawn on paper before passing onto wood, prior to the carving.



Male inmates with woodworking skills in prison.



“While they focus their minds, they also receive mental nurturing, including developing their skills and delicacies, in terms of concentration cultivation, mind training, skills advancing, and absorbing the influence of Buddhism and Naga into daily life, becoming aware that evil and virtue exist everywhere. The Naga carvings are creations made behind high prison walls, carrying a message of hope and transformation from the hidden darkness inside to the outside community through skill and belief inspired by Naga.”

Kwanchai Santiparapop believes that inmates are a vulnerable group, so it is essential to instil confidence in their skills so that they can face the outside world and not fall behind the trends once they are released. He, therefore, seeks experts with hands-on experience to pass on their knowledge and inspire them.

“We were fortunate to receive support from talented individuals—volunteer artists, multiple-time winner of the Gourmand Awards, Chef Brad - a first runner-up MasterChef Thailand, and lecturers from the Faculty of Home Economics Technology, Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep that won awards in traditional Thai cuisine, including an award presented by Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn. We also received support from the Chitralada Vocational School and Chitralada Technology Institute. These individuals are highly experienced professionals who can turn any ingredient into a uniquely crafted dish. This is the kind of hands-on expertise we truly seek for our inmate training programmes.”

In addition, there is the ‘Kitchen Studio’, a luxurious black-themed kitchen inside the prison designed and styled by volunteer artists. It is a groundbreaking initiative aimed at refining the sense of high-class culinary skills among inmates. This space is also ready to connect with organisations interested in CSR activities and social and environmental initiatives that positively impact the broader community, ranging from craftsmanship and artisanal work to culinary arts.

“When the instructors come here to teach, we also pass the training on to other provincial prisons. We already had vocational training for inmates, such as beauty services, laundry, cooking, bakery, and coffee making, taught by general trainers. But this time, we’ve brought in successful and well-known experts, which helps to inspire them, as each instructor has their unique teaching techniques.”



The director of Nakhon Pathom Central Prison discusses the design of the Naga ladle with inmates.



The black-handle Naga ladle has a sense of reverence and is a perfect souvenir for spiritual believers.



Kitchen Studio: Aesthetic Inspiration Behind Bars

It began with a volunteer artist from Bueng Kan province who had the opportunity to meet the director of Nakhon Pathom Central Prison. Previously, the artist helped design bamboo tea packaging at the Khao Prik Agro-Industrial Correctional Institution in Sikhio district, Nakhon Ratchasima province. This product of inmate vocational training is under the Kamlangjai Project, initiated under the royal patronage of Her Royal Highness Princess Bajrakitiyabha.

The artist shared his thoughts, “That was the first time I got to know Mr. Kwanchai. I told him that I had created the Bueng Kan Living Community Museum and noticed that there were many inmates undergoing vocational training in the prison—one of which involved food. So, I invited him to visit the museum and the Sophisai Model network, which is actively driving several communities by the civil sector, hoping it would spark some ideas. He then saw the Kitchen Studio at Sophisai Hospital, a small hospital with an unexpectedly beautiful kitchen space, designed so exquisitely that it was hard to believe it was meant for cooking meals for patients. He said he would love to have something like that in the prison. He later invited the volunteer artist to visit Nakhon Pathom Central Prison, as he had been newly appointed there, to help transform the prison into an admirable place.”



The volunteer artist went on to explain how what used to be a locked storage room at Nakhon Pathom Central Prison has now become the Kitchen Studio under the concept of ‘From Local to Legacy’ within the prison walls. Although the inmates still live in a confined world, **the space now reflects modernity and design that evokes a sense of freedom. The design focuses on dark tones—black and grey—creating a sleek style. A dull, box-shaped room has been transformed with counters and fully equipped kitchen tools for food preparation, creating a new experience within the prison.**

“I and the prison commander also collaborated to cook and record promotional videos on social media, not only within the Ministry of Justice, which is something new and innovative. Meanwhile, female inmates who already enjoyed cooking came to learn how to decorate a dish. They were already preparing food for fellow inmates, but they got to learn how to make the dishes look better and present them nicely. When these female inmates are released, the skills of crafting beauty and delicacy in daily life will stay with them.”

The black-handled Naga ladle on the Kitchen Studio’s counter, the training place for inmates in culinary skills.

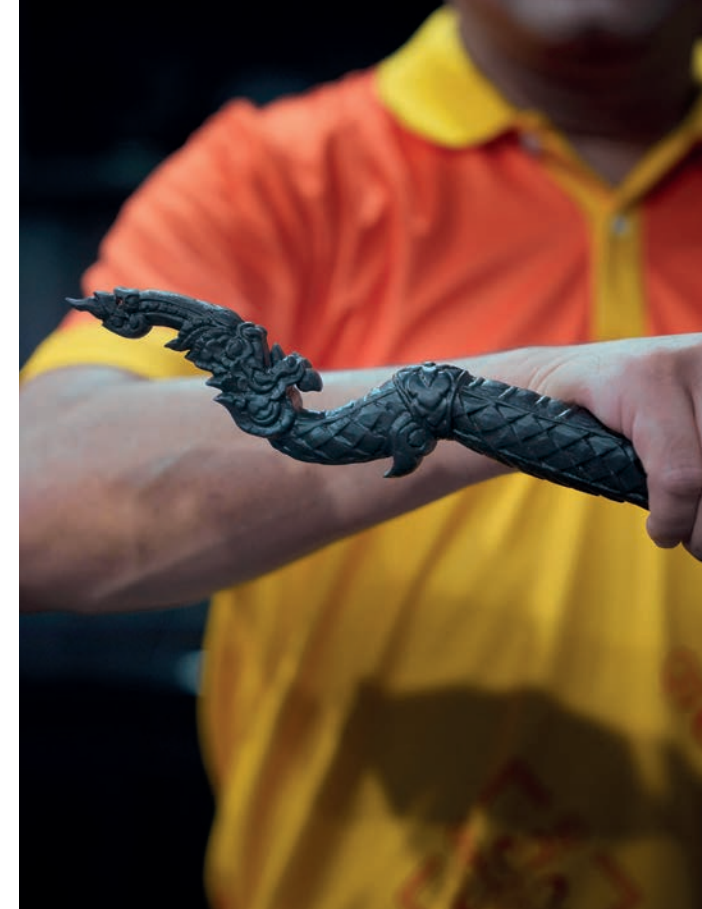


KITCHEN STUDIO

Nakhon Pathom Central Prison



*Kwanchai Santiparapop,
Director of Nakhon Pathom Central Prison*



Once the Kitchen Studio was completed, countless people came to observe the project. It became an opportunity to welcome guests from outside, which meant the food, snacks, and baked goods prepared for them also had to be pleasantly presented. The prison received support from the Chitralada Vocational School and the Chitralada Institute of Technology, which sent a team to teach a cookie-baking course to female inmates.

Male inmates are typically engaged in crafts, skilled labour, agriculture, and animal husbandry. The volunteer artist chose the design concept involving the Naga, recognising that spiritual beliefs are widespread across societies. He was particularly impressed upon discovering that the male inmates at this facility produced exceptional handwoven textiles. Creating clothing from textiles requires skills in thread spinning, pattern designing, and weaving, in which they showed high-level craftsmanship. He also visited the carpentry section, where the inmates crafted culinary tools, including sleek, black-handled Naga ladles and spatulas for use in the Kitchen Studio. The quality of these handmade items was unexpectedly high and has now become popular among the spiritual-minded, either for personal use or as meaningful gifts.

Kitchen Studio at Nakhon Pathom Central Prison warmly welcomes culinary professionals to volunteer as instructors for the inmates.



“Next, we plan to have these products gilded with gold leaf and consecrated by a revered monk so that spiritual believers can purchase them to bless them and attract prosperity. It can be considered a form of soft power. This year is the Year of the Dragon—symbolising dragons or Naga—having a Naga ladle or spatula in the kitchen is believed to bring confidence and positive energy, leading to delicious dishes, good sales, and success.”

Director Kwanchai concluded, “Nakhon Pathom Central Prison had the great honour of a royal visit from Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn on 16 April 2024.” He also wishes that everyone outside should always find the strength to keep fighting in life because even those behind bars are still fighting with encouragement, opportunities, emotional healing, and vocational training given to them. For those outside the prison who have more freedom and resources, they too can contribute—whether by volunteering, offering support, or helping the underprivileged in whatever capacity they can to build a better society.

Facebook: Nakhon Pathom Central Prison

Address: 147 Moo 6, Wang Taku subdistrict, Mueang Nakhon Pathom district, Nakhon Pathom province 73000 **Phone:** +6680 581 1434



Prison wardens at Nakhon Pathom Central Prison with handcrafted Naga ladles made by male inmates.

*The black Naga ladles for cooking perfectly
matched the dark-toned Kitchen Studio.*



SOFT POWER

The Pumpkin Naga: A Carving Marvel

Asst. Prof. Tanavit Layim, Dean of the Faculty of Home Economics Technology at the Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep, shared that his interest began with cooking, and carving was later added as a complementary skill to enhance the appeal of dishes. He started with simple carving during his childhood, such as carving papaya into the shape of leaves.

“Actually, adults usually forbid children from touching knives or any sharp objects. However, once I started learning fruit and vegetable carving, it gave me confidence. When people saw my carvings and praised them, it motivated me to improve my skills even more. I learned by observing, reading books, and through different media, but most importantly, to keep practising. Whenever I saw gorgeous carvings, I tried to improve myself to match the realism or natural likeness of the objects I was imitating, whether they were flowers or animals. Nowadays, my carvings are not limited to just flowers and leaves. They can be faces, names, or words to surprise and impress viewers. That inspiration drives me to continue refining my craft, and it all comes from my own determination.”



The Naga pumpkin, an exquisite and delicate craftsmanship full of grace.



*Naga pumpkin in sweet coconut milk dessert,
an art of carving on a dish.*



What Kinds of Fruits and Vegetables can be Carved?

Tanavit explained that first of all, one must consider the colour and texture, whether the fruit or vegetable is hard or soft, as these factors affect the carving process and the knife technique. If a fruit or vegetable is too hard, it will be challenging to carve, though it is still possible to carve not too deep. Thailand has a wide variety of fruits all year round, offering many to experiment with. For example, when travelling abroad, like in Europe, I sometimes found unfamiliar fruits and vegetables and tried carving them to explore new techniques.

“We create our work by observing the colours and shapes of fruits and vegetables, which is their natural beauty, and we add form and structure to enhance that beauty even more. This becomes a kind of art that reflects our delicacy and attention to detail. The Thai aesthetic is also very distinctive—once you see it, you immediately know it’s Thai work. I believe every type of fruit or vegetable can be carved as it all depends on what we want to express and what creative challenge we are given. We shouldn’t say no; we should try first. Our creation could end up being a one-of-a-kind piece in the world. If we limit ourselves to carving only certain fruits in only certain ways, we’re closing the door of opportunity. But if we always open up to challenges, each piece can become a meaningful, interesting, and even valuable piece of art.”



more challenging because it requires studying the anatomy of each animal. The form we choose to carve can either be realistic, like a sculpture, or more playful and stylised, depending on which we wish to achieve.”

“For a Naga pattern, I consider a high-level design requiring great detail. You need to proportion it carefully; otherwise, it’ll just look like a regular snake. The details added, like the scales, eyes, and tail, all demand delicacy. Anyone who wants to carve a Naga must practise and use their imagination to visualise what a Naga looks like. When carving fruits or vegetables, we also need to consider their shape and size to see what kind of Naga form can be created. Nagas come in many forms—there are one-headed, two-headed, three-headed types, and so on. You have to study the different styles, how they swim, slither, or curl up spirally. That detail, such as fangs and horns, must be researched because it’s important to understand the features of a Naga. If a carver has good observation skills, they’ll be able to replicate the form beautifully and proportionately, just like a fine piece of art.”

(Top) A dish featuring Naga pumpkin in sweet coconut milk presented in a bowl, surrounded by intricately carved pumpkin flowers.



The craftsmanship of pumpkin carving allows a variety of subjects, such as Nagas, flowers, and leaves.



Naga taro coconut pudding

Naga Pumpkin in Sweet Coconut Milk

Once the art of traditional Thai fruit and vegetable carving is understood, attention turns to the delicious dish featuring a Naga-shaped carving, the fakthong kaeng buad or pumpkin in sweet coconut milk. The instructor explained that the process begins by shaping and carving the pumpkin into the basic outline of the Naga. Then, the intricate details are added, starting from the head to the body and down to the tail.

“Fine details, even the eyes, are added. The carved piece is then gently steamed until fully cooked, and boiling is avoided to prevent the carving from breaking or becoming mushy. Once cooked, coconut milk is simmered with palm sugar, a pinch of salt, and pandan leaves. We must stir the component continuously to prevent the coconut milk from separating. Then, the carved pumpkin Naga is briefly simmered in the coconut mixture, allowing the flavour to infuse. Lastly, the dish is arranged with additional decorative elements such as carved flowers to enhance its visual appeal.”

“For the takoh phuak (taro coconut pudding), steamed taro is mixed into the flour base to infuse a fragrant aroma. The coconut topping is tinted with butterfly pea flowers to create a beautiful blue hue. As for the Naga-shaped taro, it is steamed until cooked, just like the pumpkin, to preserve the intricate carving details.”

(Top) A professor from the Faculty of Home Economics Technology skilled in fruit and vegetable carving.



*Naga Pumpkin in
Sweet Coconut Milk*

Naga taro coconut pudding

*Naga Taro Khanom Mor Kaeng
(baked Thai custard)*



Naga taro khanom mo kaeng is served on a plate surrounded by flowers, with gold leaf added for a graceful and exquisite presentation.

“After that, the dish is arranged carefully so that the Naga figure stands out and its colour doesn’t blend into the coconut topping. The flavour features the fragrance of taro and a light sweetness from the sugar. The dish is then beautifully decorated. Takoh is a familiar and easy-to-eat Thai dessert, which is why this menu was chosen. As for the baked khanom mor kaeng, the dessert itself contains taro as one of the ingredients. The carving is in low relief with a modest size, positioned on top to highlight the Naga. Once baked, the dessert has a special aroma from the heated sugar and the eggs from the recipe, resulting in the harmonious flavour of the taro and the mor kaeng. When arranged, the golden-brown colour of the khanom mor kaeng helps the Naga figure stand out, creating a well-balanced and elegant presentation.”

How to Encourage the Younger Generation to Take Interest in Carving

Since fruit and vegetable carving is a delicate craft that requires practice and genuine passion, not everyone can easily master it. As a professor of home economics who has a deep love for both food and the art of carving, Dr. Tanavit believes that for young learners who each have different interests and abilities, the first step is to let them start by doing what they are naturally interested in.

(Top right) Associate Professor Tanavit Layim, Dean of the Faculty of Home Economics Technology, Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep, and master artisan in fruit and vegetable carving.





Various Naga carving styles of grace and beauty.

“Let them see the value of their work and what they can express. Sometimes, even small pieces can be interesting. It’s not necessary to start with intricate carvings right away. Just begin by trimming fruit and making it ready to serve. Once they get the basics, they can gradually move on to more detailed pieces. They should be given the chance to express themselves. When people taste their work and offer feedback or compliments, it inspires them to want to do more. That leads them to go back, learn, and create something new. For example, I once had the opportunity to teach students from an audio-supported programme who were deaf or have special needs, but they were still able to do it.”

“These cases were shared with other students so they understand that even those who are hearing-impaired, have shaky hands, or minor cognitive challenges can still do basic carving. Sometimes, we even go into correctional facilities to teach, and we bring our students along so they can see firsthand that everyone is capable of carving, though their methods may differ. For instance, in this project, there were 2–3 people helping. Some were skilled in cooking, others in carving. We combined our talents and integrated them. If a carved piece isn’t displayed or shared, its value is lost. But once people see it, it inspires us to keep creating more. In Thailand, there are many artists who carve Naga figures from fruits and vegetables.”

(Top left) Associate Professor Tanavit Layim, Dean of the Faculty of Home Economics Technology, Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep



Ingredients for Naga tako pheuak are carefully arranged for dessert preparation.



Naga carved from taro.



Naga carved from pumpkin.



The New Perspective: Naga as Food

In Thailand, the Naga is a sacred figure, revered and worshipped. When adapted into food such as Naga fakthong kaeng buad, Naga takoh pheuak, and khanom mo kaeng pheuak with Naga, the creators initially felt whether it would be appropriate. However, once they tried and arranged the elements, the beauty that emerged clearly added value to the dish, making it a meaningful transformation.

"I just want to say that the Naga doesn't have to remain solely a sacred figure. It can also be reimagined in new and creative ways. Many people who are skilled at carving Naga figures might find inspiration to try expressing them through food. After all, it's edible, and there's no taboo against it. At first, some may wonder if it's appropriate or not, but today, we've shown that it is possible. The result is another form of artistry, aesthetic and appetising. Instead of just respect, people can now experience the Naga through taste. The Naga is everywhere, and perhaps even brought closer to us. Seeing them in these kinds of forms might inspire many others to follow us."

In the context of 'Naga for the community', its influence spans multiple dimensions—including food culture. When foreigners witness the ways of life and the beliefs of Thai people, including the culinary traditions, they are often left in awe. This semi-art form then shows that the Naga truly belongs everywhere. In the field of home economics, the Naga could possibly inspire many more creative directions, such as bakery products, handicrafts, decorative arts, and ceremonial offerings like Bai Sri.

Facebook: Faculty of Home Economics Technology:

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Naga in Southern Thailand

*Naga spouting water sculpture,
Mueang Songkhla district, Songkhla province*

Naga in Southern Thai culture appears in both belief systems and various traditions. It is commonly seen as a symbol associated with water, an essential element that sustains the fertility of crops and natural abundance. Southerners believe that the Naga sprays divine water to refresh and purify both body and soul.

In the traditional Nang Talung (southern shadow puppetry) of Southern Thailand, as well as in parts of Malaysia such as Kelantan and Kedah, key puppet figures were often carved with a Naga as their footrest or portrayed as standing on a Naga—implying that the Naga served as their support or vehicle. For example, puppets of deities such as Phra In (Indra), giants, or city rulers were designed with a Naga base beneath their feet.

In addition, Nang Talung puppets have been used as decorative elements, particularly as symbolic vehicles in ceremonial arts. For example, Naga figures are often featured in Khao Phansa (the beginning of the Buddhist Lent) candle procession or on the ceremonial barge used in the Lak Phra (pulling the Buddha image) tradition. This custom reflects the belief that the act of Lak Phra would please the Naga and bring rainfall in accordance with seasonal needs.



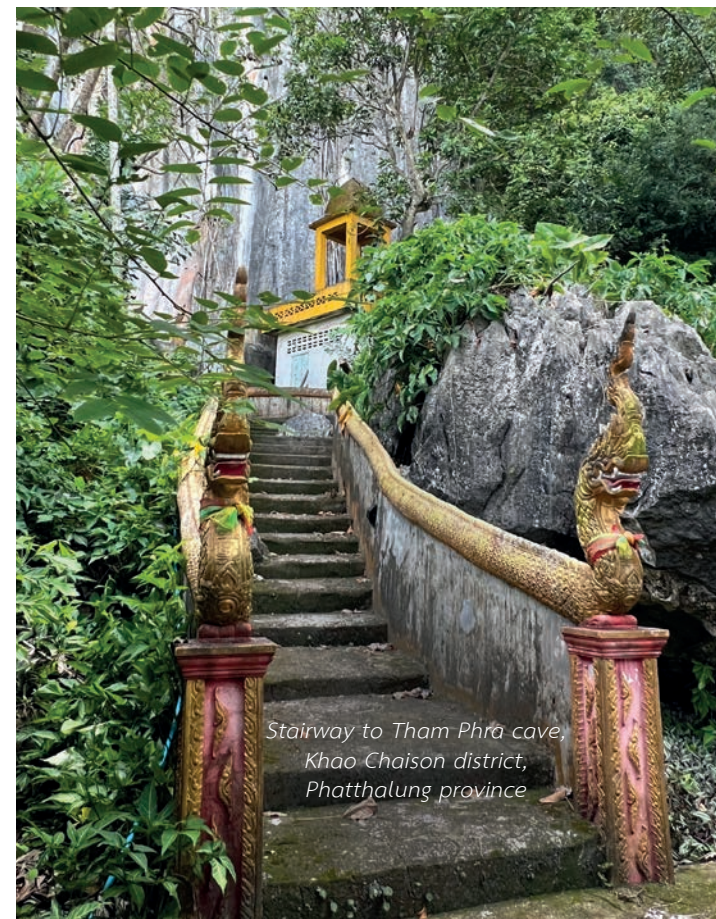


*Naga at Tham Phra cave,
Khao Chaison district, Phatthalung province*

In Southern Thailand, Naga sculptures can be found at various locations and temples closely associated with water. Examples include the Naga spouting water sculpture in Songkhla province, the Naga cave at Khao Chaison in Khao Chaison district, Phatthalung province, and the Naga at Wat Pa Khom in Mueang Phatthalung district.

For the Nang Talung leather carving in Khao Chaison district, Phatthalung province, which is renowned for its outstanding craftsmanship, Uncle Somphong and his son have opened their home as a learning centre. Their home is located just across from Tham Khao Chaison Cave, a popular community-based tourist destination with a Naga sculpture sited inside the cave, which offers insight into both traditional and contemporary Nang Talung carving. A highlight product particularly popular in the summer is the handheld fan carved in the shape of a Naga. Due to its portability, this modern adaptation has become a distinctive local contemporary souvenir from Khao Chaison. What was just a skill the father determined to pass on to his son now plays a vital role in preserving the cultural heritage and cultural capital of the community for future generations.

(Top) Wat Pa Khom, Mueang Phatthalung district, Phatthalung province



*Stairway to Tham Phra cave,
Khao Chaison district,
Phatthalung province*



*Wat Pa Khom,
Mueang Phatthalung district,
Phatthalung province*

SOFT POWER

The Nang Talung Naga: Crafting Culture, Creating Careers

Nang Talung traces its origins to India, originally known as Chhaya Natak, which gradually spread throughout Southeast Asia and into Thailand via Malaysia. It became a deeply rooted local performance and cultural heritage of the south over the centuries. The performance involves the narration of mythical and folk stories through elaborately carved leather puppets delivered in local southern dialects.

The Malay people call Nang Talung as Wayang Kulit. The word wayang means figure, while kulit means skin, and together, it refers to puppets made from animal hide. It is also believed that Nang Talung was adapted from Nang Yai (grand shadow puppetry), with its figures scaled down in size.





Sompong Chujit, a master puppet craftsman from Khao Chaison subdistrict, Khao Chaison district, Phatthalung province, shared that he is now 68 years old, but he began carving puppets at the age of 16 and has remained in the industry for 52 years. His love and connection to Nang Talung have kept him passionate about the art throughout his life, never turning to any other career.

The process begins with purchasing fresh cowhide from the Bang Kaeo district, then trimming the connective tissue off and thoroughly cleaning the hind with vinegar. Once cleaned, it's stretched and left to dry in the sun for around three days. After that, the dried hide can be carved into various Nang Talung puppet figures, such as Garuda, Naga, and even Luang Pu Thuat (a famous Thai Buddhist monk), depending on customer requests.

Uncle Sompong shared, "The tools used for carving Nang Talung are carving blocks, engraving blocks, and punch tools. Also, a small mallet to help punch the patterns through the hide and pointed knives, which we make ourselves from hacksaw blades. Other materials include paints and coating oils. Some customers buy the pieces to frame at home as decorations or ornaments. Hence, when we get orders, we try to design each one with variety and uniqueness. Phatthalung is considered the home of Nang Talung—it's a tradition that can always be seen at ordination and wedding ceremonies."

(Right) Uncle Sompong Chujit, dressed in a traditional southern sarong, with the preserved cultural capital—Nang Talung—continues to attract tourists who come to support and purchase the crafts.

SOFT POWER





Nang Talung for Lives and Careers

Besides being a treasured cultural art form, Nang Talung also gives career and income. For example, Uncle Sompong has never worked in any other profession besides the Nang Talung industry; although he can do different things like building his own house, his true passion remains in Nang Talung puppet crafting.

“Nang Talung crafting can actually support the whole family. I have three children. The one who will carry on the craft is my son, Thawatchai, so my two daughters became teachers. I once talked with friends that if I had a son, I would pass on the skills to him. When I really had a son, he chose to study at Songkhla Rajabhat University but fell ill. It was dengue fever at first, but he started to turn paralysed in the second semester and was bedridden. We then brought him back home and took him to many doctors, wherever we heard was good, even to Pattani, until he recovered. Later, he enrolled at Ramkhamhaeng University but got sick again. I then told him not to continue studying and instead pursue the Nang Talung craft. From then on, he became healthy and has never fallen seriously ill. It seems this craft was meant for him to carry on.”

In addition to his skills in Nang Talung intricate carving, Uncle Sompong is also talented in solo puppet performances—performing and narrating all by himself. “I just recite verses and narrate the story,” he explained. “If I get invited to a talk show, it’s no trouble. I’ll perform a short scene as a demonstration. I’ve even done a show for students at Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, and it was well-received.”

(Right) Uncle Sompong Chujit, with his Nang Talung hand fan carved with a Naga motif, is an ideal portable item for Thailand’s tropical climate.





Beliefs about the Naga

This Nang Talung craftsman from Phatthalung shared that he still remembers and feels moved by the story of the Naga who once requested to be ordained during the time of the Buddha. He said it left a strong impression on him and deepened his respect for the Naga’s faith in Buddhism.

“I believe the Naga supports my work and livelihood. Though I’m not rich, I can live comfortably. Just across my house is Tham Khao Chaison cave, where a carved image of the Naga is enshrined. Down here in the south, we believe in the connection between the Naga and Buddhism. I’ve carved scenes like Rama stepping on the Naga and even walking sticks in the form of the Naga. This year is the Year of the Dragon or the Great Serpent, and I think the Naga-shaped Nang Talung fans could do very well. Thailand is a hot country, and these Naga fans are portable and unique. If government agencies helped promote them nationwide, it could really become widespread.”

(Top) The Southern way of life often includes raising birds, as auspicious birds are believed to bring good fortune to the home.



*The colouring process of Nang Talung figures:
colours must be vivid and contrasting to catch the attention.*



Today, Uncle Sompong has transformed the lower floor of his home into a neat and charming space in order to open his living space as a community learning centre. This has drawn a steady stream of visitors, with tour groups often stopping by for Nang Talung workshops, adding a lively atmosphere to the place. Beyond the delicately carved Nang Talung puppets, his centre also offers a variety of Naga-themed products such as Naga earrings, Naga brooches, handheld fans made from sugar palm wood, as well as regular shape fans in black, brown, purple, and green tones.

“If the government wants to promote soft power, there should be an agency that surveys and registers these products properly and helps publicise them. It’s hard to do it all ourselves without funding. As for the Naga-themed pieces, as this is the Year of the Dragon, I think they’re promising. Last year, I made rabbit-themed ones, and those did fairly well, too. In fact, I think Thai people need to stop looking down on themselves. When I first started crafting Nang Talung, my father told me not to bother and said I couldn’t make a living from it. That’s the kind of mindset that holds us back. In reality, this craft has supported me all along. I was able to send both my daughters through university to become teachers, all thanks to Nang Talung.”

(Left) Khao Chaison, a solitary limestone mountain opposite the Nang Talung house, is a well-known attraction in Phatthalung.





The Successor of Nang Talung

Thawatchai Chujit shared that he takes great pride in inheriting and learning the traditional wisdom of Nang Talung leather carving from his father. He has also turned it into a career that supports his livelihood while also helping preserve this cultural heritage from disappearing. He found that the craft that has been passed down through generations is something profound and meaningful. It makes him happy and truly proud. He plans to keep developing the Nang Talung to meet the diverse interests and preferences of the customers.

“We must preserve the traditional works while gradually developing new products to attract younger customers. We have introduced modern items such as earrings and souvenirs that are affordable and appeal to both women and men. Those with limited budgets can buy smaller items, while those who can spend more may support us by purchasing larger pieces; it all depends on their satisfaction. I would like to invite tourists to visit Baan Nang Talung in Khao Chaison district, Phatthalung, which now doubles as a cultural learning centre. We also offer DIY workshops where visitors can create their own masterpieces. We’re open every day, so you just need to contact us. Supporting us means helping the community generate sustainable income.”

Facebook: Baan Nang Talung

Thawatchai Chujit, Baan Nang Talung, Khao Chaison district, Phatthalung province

Phone: +6685 897 2605



*Sompong Chujit (Father)
Thawatchai Chujit (Son)*



The Naga Nang Talung fans in a variety of contemporary styles, designed as practical and ready-to-use products perfect for Thailand's hot weather. From the familiar image of a fire-breathing Naga, the design transforms into a wind-blowing Naga.



Uncle Somphong Chujit with sun-dried cowhide used for crafting Nang Talung puppets.



The Naga-themed fans are customised in colour to suit personal preferences.



(Left) Nakathibodi Srisuttho

(Right) The Regal Naga Pair by Pasin Ruangwut



Pasin Ruangwut
Actor, Performer, MC

“We saw Bai Sri makers, tour guides, and Naga spiritual teachers develop various livelihoods, and media personnel helped spread the stories, making Phu Langka widely recognised. It marks a true turning point, showing that **the Naga can truly change lives.**”

The Naga Believers

A man who believes and has faith in the Naga and studies its stories sees that humans are just living creatures among others, like ants, insects, and mosquitoes. He believes that we are living beings sharing this world together. Therefore, we are not the rulers of the world but inhabitants who must live in harmony with the environment, culture, and beliefs.

“I have seen the model ‘Naga for the People and Communities’ happen in many places. There is a strong faith in it as I have witnessed grandparents teaching their grandchildren, which helps the younger generation learn and develop faith. **I believe in the concept of protection and guardianship by the Naga, which doesn’t only protect religion but also the community and the hearts of the people.** The Naga follow the five precepts, and also deities. I am therefore impressed in the stories that the Naga respect the Buddha, just as we do.”

“I’ve visited Bueng Kan province several times to film the show ‘Tracing the Footsteps of the Naga’. There are many places connected to the Naga, some of which were long overlooked. Whenever such a place resurfaces in the eyes of the public, its legends are also revived. For example, the story of Pu Aue Lue, who was cursed by the Naga lord to guard Phu Langka. The release from this curse came when the place became known, and people flocked to Tham Naka and Tham Nakee caves. This brought about new professions and income for the local community.”

“We saw Bai Sri makers, tour guides, and Naga spiritual teachers develop various livelihoods, and media personnel helped spread the stories, making Phu Langka widely recognised. It marks a true turning point, showing that **the Naga can truly change lives.**”



Katha Chinabanchorn
Astrologer

The Naga is considered a form of soft power, a unique symbol of Thai imagination. It represents fertility, abundance, prosperity, and wealth. Therefore, I would like to invite everyone to unite in making Naga Thailand’s soft power so that the world can recognise it for the stability and sustainability of our communities and our land.

The astrologer gave his opinion that “Naga is not just a symbol, but the spirit of Thailand and ASEAN. It is a melting pot of cultures and traditions that has influenced the way people live for thousands of years. From the belief in water, which brings abundance, growth, and creation, to the widespread belief that the Naga influences agricultural produce. Naga is not merely a cultural belief but is embedded in the spirit, which makes me see the image of the Naga as a symbol of positive energy.”

Tracing the footsteps of the Naga is considered sustainable tourism because it can be enjoyed in every season—whether summer, winter, rainy season or the green season. This is because the Naga is connected to Heed 12 and Kong 14 (which refer to the traditions and customs of each month related to Buddhist principles, beliefs, and agricultural ways of life, long upheld by the Isaan people). It reflects the culture and spirit of the Isaan Thai community. We have the Khao Phansa festival during the rainy season and the Ok Phansa in the late rainy to early cool season. Also, festivals such as Loy Krathong, the Lhai Reau Faii Festival, and the Bun Khao Sak merit-making ceremony are all connected to water, life, and the Naga.

Faith-based tourism nowadays is not just about travelling. Tourists also help distribute income to people in the community, the province, and various sectors, including accommodation, food, goods, and community products.

What is truly admirable is how imagination and creativity have been combined into products, works, and tourist attractions that bring positive energy. For example, the Bueng Kan Living Community Museum, which I have visited, is contemporary and modern. This shows that the Naga is not just a belief but can also contribute to the communities, leading to prosperity and improving the quality of life for the locals. This is a very meaningful way to uplift the community’s wellbeing.

Nowadays, **the Naga is considered a form of soft power, a unique symbol of Thai imagination. It represents fertility, abundance, prosperity, and wealth.** Therefore, I would like to invite everyone to unite in making Naga Thailand’s soft power so that the world can recognise it for the stability and sustainability of our communities and our land.

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- Thailand - Nagas Thai Soft Power, Suthipong Suriya, Photos Ploenta Studio (Office of the Permanent Secretary, The Prime Minister) In English or Thai

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