

News

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**DISCOVER THAILAND**

## Relaxing through meditation

***A riverside house on Ko Kred island in Nonthaburi has a recipe for peace of the mind, body and soul. Cooking and garland-making make up side attractions***

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**Baan Dvara-prateep opens to the cool of the Chao Phraya River.**



**A blooming lotus rising from a jar accentuates the classic style of Baan Dvara-prateep.**

In one lifetime, it is unusual for a person to experience two life-threatening car accidents, but that is exactly what Kasemsook Phamonsathit has been through. Now 58, Kasemsook feels she has seen it all. Both the accidents left indelible marks and it was only through meditation and sheer will power that she was able to come to terms with her painful past. Although frail and in failing health that prevents her from travelling as much as she would have liked to, Pa Sai, as she calls herself, still manages to share her experience and the power of meditation with other less fortunate souls.

These days she divides her time between Pattaya, Bangkok and Nonthaburi. In Pattaya she conducts training for meditation students at Happiness Camp. Only recently, with support from her family, Kasemsook was able to do what she had wanted a long time: open a riverside house as a sanctuary for meditation and peace lovers.

Ms Kasemsook, which can be literally translated as delighted and in bliss, believes meditation helped her through physical pain and injury.

"I started practising meditation when I was eight," she said. "I feel I had been preparing for what was going to happen later in my life," she said.

Growing up in a conservative Thai family in a riverside setting, she recounted, mom taught her to be cool as the river. The river brought benefits to people who lived along its banks. "Be a giver like the river. Make yourself the guiding light like the moon and stars," she reminisced her mom's teachings.

Kradung-nga, a tropical flower, emits cool, deep fragrance when its petals are heated over a flame. "Mom taught us that life is a mix of happiness and misery. The hardship that we face makes us strong and lend essence to our existence, like the smell from kradung-nga petals put to flame," she continued.

As a tribute to her mother, she built a riverside home and decided to make it her personal retreat. Later she realised that it would be nicer to share her experience with other people.

"I am not different from other people. I still love comfort.

"Meditation has practical applications in our daily life. At work it helps you carry on well with what you are doing. In group situations it enhances team work," Ms Kasemsook said. She believes team spirit will be enhanced if we can improve individual minds.

"Meditation can refine people's emotions. If we are bad-tempered, people around us are also affected. Meditation can help us calm down quickly," she added.



**Kasemsook Phamonsathit invites people to experience relaxation through meditation at her home in Ko Kred, Nonthaburi.**

On a curve that is part of Ko Kred island in Nonthaburi there is a long wooden landing that leads to a gracefully built house. The sign on the landing reads "Baan Dvara-prateep, House of Culture and History Appreciation". The sun brightens the reddish brown wooden bars that form an airy landing fence. Apparently, four houses built in redwood on firm stilts are connected by wooden bridge. All of them exude a sense of Thai-ness in both classical and contemporary style.



**A relaxing corner is created in the classic Thai style.**

The house that sits closest to the landing pier is set aside as dining area decorated with stupa photography. It overlooks a beautiful stretch of the Chao Phraya River. The roar from long-tail boats can be heard occasionally.

When the tide is high Baan Dvara-prateep floats as if it were a 2.5 rai plot in the middle of the river. It was conceived as a plain and simple house, not a resort, and a seat of happiness. It is a place that only welcomes a small group of people to experience relaxation through meditation.



**Spending the afternoon learning the art of making scented flowers.**

Appointed with only 11 rooms, Baan Dvara-prateep was built at a cost of 15 million baht. It provides courses in meditation for those seeking peace of mind.

Ms Kasemsook, a life-time meditation practitioner, is aiming to serve small groups of people who wish to improve teamwork and cooperative spirit.



**A classic Thai decorative touch and riverine setting permeate Baan Dvara-prateep.**

The place was carefully chosen before it was turned into a retreat for meditation. It is not too far from Bangkok. The rooms were designed to have nothing else than what's absolutely necessary. There is no TV in the rooms as we cannot control people's TV-watching habit. The surroundings and atmosphere encourage people to come out and see life around the resort.

"My intention is to encourage people to come here and absorb its aesthetic quality and simple atmosphere. As Baan Dvara-prateep is close to other riverside houses, it offers visitors a good opportunity to refresh their memories about the vanishing Thai way of life," she elaborated.

A two-day meditation course begins in the morning with an hour-long Body & Mind Solution on a veranda overlooking the river. It is like a stretching programme that helps improve blood circulation and respiration. The work-out is so practical that it can be further developed/improved on one's own initiative at home or at work. Conducted by Dr Anuchit Kittipongkosol, the session continues with a health talk followed by brief meditation before guests sit down to break fast.

The house and its river setting provide a perfect backdrop for activities truly Thai, such as making scented flowers. A wide range of other choice activities can be arranged such as the art of fruit peeling and carving and garland making. It seems there has also been a conscious attempt to revive the vanishing Thai culture, although meditation sessions continue to hold central stage.

"The meditation sessions we conduct are not that serious or advanced like those offered at other centres. Ours are geared toward offering participants relaxation through peace of mind," she explained.

She cited meditation through appreciation of music. Music can help fine-tune the body system. The six-minute exercise can improve blood circulation, muscle movement and concentration power.

Ms Kasemsook has spent over 20 years studying stupas across Asia and built a museum of sorts at home. Her fascination with stupas began at a very early age when she used to go out sailing with her mother in Ayutthaya.

"My mom could not answer some of the questions I put to her about the stupas. But even then I remember they appeared graceful at sunrise, sunset and when it rained," she recalled.

When she grew up she kept returning to Ayutthaya to see the stupas and fell in love with the one at Wat Chai Wattanaram. "I liked its shape. It's peaceful," she said.

One thing she couldn't figure out then was why all stupas had to have pointed spires.

"It's like the hands folded in the shape of a lotus when paying respects to Lord Buddha," the elders told me then. "Later I found out the spires were there to symbolise nirvana."

She has turned a part of her house into a museum highlighting stupas across Asia \_ Borobodur in Yogjarkata, South Korea, China and so on \_ complete with models, pictorials and messages they seek to convey.

"These days people have less understanding of stupas. The stupa symbolises dhamma and philosophy. I wish my museum can inspire more people to appreciate stupas," she concluded.

## Travel tips

Baan Dvara-prateep (tel 02-538-4212, 933-1092, 01-845-5445, [www.baandvaraprteep.com](http://www.baandvaraprteep.com)) offers a two-day meditation retreat costing 4,000 baht per person on twin-sharing basis, including one-night accommodation, meals and a boat tour around Ko Kred.