

Lauder Intercultural Venture 2023

Thailand: Buddhist Material Culture and Magic

March 2-12, 2023



This LIV introduces students to an alternative perspective to pop-cultural stereotypes about Buddhism by engaging them with Buddhist material culture and ritual practices in Thailand. Popular references to Buddhism perpetuate curated ideals of mindfulness, non-attachment, “emptiness”, minimalism, and disdain for material goods and consumerism. However, these assumptions are true for only a select number of Buddhist schools, like Zen Buddhism, which is part of the larger Mahayana branch of Buddhism. As such, these assumptions undermine everyday practices of a majority of Buddhists across Southeast Asia, which is part of the Theravada branch of Buddhism. Questions like, “Is Buddhism a philosophy, a religion, or a way of life?”, entrap Buddhism to fit a particular mold that does not accurately reflect practices in reality. Students will observe how Buddhism in Thailand can be all three – philosophy, religion, and a way of life. More importantly, students will explore how the material and ritual aspects of Buddhism are an integral part of everyday life. Buddhist materials -- like statues of the Buddha, other Buddhist deities, even Hindu deities, Buddhist monks, Buddhist kings, alongside Buddhist amulets, talismans, and yantras, as well as embodied materials like sacred Buddhist tattoos or magical diagrams inscribed on taxi cabs and buildings, and spirit houses, too -- are ubiquitous.

The geographic focus of the LIV is situated in the capital region of Bangkok. We will have a guided tour of an amulet market and the Buddhist products district. We will visit temples, and meet monks, including one who specializes in Buddhist astrology and oracle cards. Students will also participate in a one-day meditation retreat, to juxtapose the material culture with the Buddhist soteriological goal. In a post-meditation lecture and discussion, students will learn how the material world connects with meditation, and in some cases can even be essential for advancing in one’s meditation practice. This LIV will also provide critical perspectives from a guest lecture by Sulak Sivaraksa, a socially engaged Buddhist activist who was twice nominated for the Nobel peace prize. Moreover, a lecture by Edoardo Siani will provide contextual background on some contemporary practices especially as it relates to the monarchy.

In talks, discussions, and guided visits, students will explore how Buddhist objects are inseparable from Buddhist practice in Thailand, even for those practitioners who claim to focus only on meditation, scriptures, or philosophy of Buddhism. These objects connect the *sangha* (Buddhist clergy) with the laity, demonstrating their symbiotic relationship. Without these Buddhist material things, and without the “consumption” of these things, there would be no Buddhism.

Flight Information

Participants are expected to make their own travel arrangements to and from JFK airport in New York. Please be sure to arrive at least 3 hours in advance of departure for international flights and give yourself plenty of extra time to anticipate potential traffic or other issues.

Thursday, March 2, 2023 (Arriving Saturday, March 4, 2023). New York City to Bangkok with layover in Doha:
(Qatar Airways) QR 0702 02MAR JFK to DOH 7:50pm – 4:05pm +1 - 4 hour, 10 minute layover
(Qatar Airways) QR 0830 03MAR DOH to BKK 8:15pm - 6:35am +1

Sunday, March 12, 2023 (Arriving Sunday, March 12, 2023). Bangkok to New York City with layover in Doha:
(Qatar Airways) QR 0837 12MAR BKK to DOH 1:50am - 5:15am - 2 hour, 40 minute layover
(Qatar Airways) QR 0701 12MAR DOH to JFK 7:55am - 3:45pm

Hotel Information

[Eastin Grand Hotel Sathorn](#) (nights of March 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10)
33 1 S Sathon Rd, Khwaeng Yan Nawa
Bangkok 10120, Thailand (+66 2 210 8100)

[Wat Bhaddanta Asabharam monastery meditation retreat](#) (night of March 9)
118/1 Moon 1, Ban Nong Pru
Tambon Nong Phai Kaeo, Amphoe Ban Bueng
Chonburi Province, 20220 Thailand

Required Readings

- Schein, E. "Three levels of culture." *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (4th ed.). 2010, pp.23- 33.

Professor Kerekes has asked that you complete the required readings below in the following order:

- Keown, Damien. 2013. *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- McDaniel, Justin. 2011. "The Lovelorn Ghost and the Magical Monk: Practicing Buddhism in Modern Thailand". Interview with Kristian Petersen. Religion. New Books Network. December 7, 2011. Audio. 1:10:23
- McDaniel, Justin. 2015. "Liberation Materiality: Thai Buddhist Amulets and the Benefits of Selling Sacred Stuff". *Material Religion* 11, no 3: 401-403. DOI: 10.1080/17432200.2015.1082735
- Cornwell-Smith, Philip. 2005. "Amulet Collectors: Lucky charms as a lifestyle." In *Very Thai: Everyday Popular Culture*, 142-145. Bangkok: River Books Co., Ltd.
- Cornwell-Smith, Philip. 2005. "Palad Khik: The eternal power of phallic." In *Very Thai: Everyday Popular Culture*, 156-159. Bangkok: River Books Co., Ltd.
- Siani, Edoardo. 2019. "How Thailand's Generals Rule by Numbers and the Stars." *New York Times*. January 17, 2019.

Recommended Readings

- Jackson, Peter. 2022. "Empowered Amulets and Spirit Possession: Material and Ritual Dimensions of the Thai Cults of Wealth." In *Capitalism Magic Thailand: Modernity with Enchantment*, 2011-238. Singapore: ISEAS, YUSof Ishak Institute.
- Siani, Edoardo. 2020. "The Sovereigns of Thailand and the Skies." *New York Times*. November 3, 2020.

Tentative Itinerary

Thursday, March 2	Depart JFK for Bangkok
7:50pm	Group flight departs JFK airport for Bangkok with layover in Doha (Qatar Airways) QR 0702 02MAR JFK to DOH 7:50pm – 4:05pm +1 - 4 hour, 10 minute layover (Qatar Airways) QR 0830 03MAR DOH to BKK 8:15pm - 6:35am +1
Friday, March 3	
	Day lost to time zone shifting
Saturday, March 4	Bangkok arrival. B, D
6:35am	Group flight lands in Bangkok Collect luggage, go through immigration and liaise with tour manager Anne +66 89 989 4259 to take bus to hotel
Circa 8:30am	Students arrive at the Eastin Grand Hotel Sathorn
8:30am-10:00am	Short break/some light breakfast food will be available in the hotel meeting room space for our group
10:00am-11:30am	Lecture: Introduction to Thailand – Prof. Susanne Kerekes (Location: hotel meeting space)
11:30am-1:30pm	Lunch on own nearby while awaiting hotel rooms to open up for check-in
2:00pm	Students check-in to hotel
2:00pm-5:40pm	Group Reflection # 1 (Find the prompts on Canvas) Free time to meet with your group to work on reflection
5:40pm	Meet in hotel lobby to walk to restaurant as a group
6:00pm-8:00pm	Welcome Dinner at The Yard restaurant (address: 22, 1 11 Yan Nawa, Sathon, Bangkok)
Sunday, March 5	Bangkok. B, D Introduction to Temples
Starts at 6:00am	Breakfast at hotel
8:30am	Turn in Group Reflection Paragraph #1 via Canvas by 8:30am deadline
9:00am - 10:00am	Lecture: Introduction to Temples – Prof. Susanne Kerekes (Location: hotel meeting space)
10:15am – 11:15am	Transport to Grand Palace via Skytrain (BTS 3 stops to Sala Daeng) and transfer to underground (MRT Silom to Sanam Chai, 5 stops)
11:30am – 1:00pm	Grand Palace
1:00pm – 2:45pm	Lunch on own
2:50pm	Be at meeting spot: Across the street from a shop called “Hello Sit Down by Ladda Aunt” (296 Maha Rat Road, Phra Borom Maha Ratchawang, Phra Nakhon, Bangkok) – directly across from the shop entrance is the main entrance for the reclining Buddha section of the monastery
3:00pm – 4:15pm	Wat Pho (Temple of the Reclining Buddha)
4:30pm – 5:30pm	Return to hotel via underground and Skytrain
6:00pm – 8:00pm	Dinner (buffet) at Blue Elephant restaurant (right next door to hotel) with Wharton alum Jeff Lee, Vice President, Customer Experience Group at Agoda . Lauder will cover the cost of this meal.

Monday, March 6	Bangkok. B The Buddhist holiday Makha Bucha/Magha Puja is today. Socially Engaged Buddhism and Temple Rituals
Starts at 6:00am	Breakfast at the hotel
9:30am – 11:00am	Lecture: Socially Engaged Buddhism – Sulak Sivaraksa, 1994 Nobel Peace Prize nominee (Location: hotel meeting space)
11:15am – 12:00pm	Take Skytrain 7 stops to Bang Wa and transfer on MRT (3 stops to Itsaraphap; 38-minute ride total)
12:00pm – 12:15pm	Walk to Green Leaf restaurant (address: 19, 345/18 Arun Amarin Road, Wat Arun, Bangkok Noi, Bangkok)
12:15pm – 2:00pm	Lunch on own at Green Leaf restaurant (we have a confirmed reservation here for the entire group due to few choices being available in this area). Please note that students will need to pay on their own for this meal.
2:00pm – 2:15pm	Walk to Wat Mai Phiren (small temple) to meet monk, Phra Maha Yongyut (aka Astro-monk)
2:15pm – 4:00pm	Phra Maha Yongyut (aka Astro-monk) meeting and Q&A
4:00pm – 6:00pm	Wat Arun (Temple of Dawn) – tour of temple, Q&A with monks and participate in (or observe) a common blessing ritual
6:00pm – 6:30pm	Transport back to hotel by boat and 1-stop on Skytrain
	Dinner on own and rest of evening free
Tuesday, March 7	Bangkok. B Amulet Market and Buddhist Products District
Starts at 6:00am	Breakfast at hotel
8:50am	Meet in hotel lobby
9:00am – 10:00am	Transport to Thammasat University via Skytrain one stop and then boat from Saphan Taksin BTS station to Pier Tha Prachan (closest pier to Thammasat)
10:00 am – 11:00am	Lecture at Thammasat University : Thai Amulet Market and Economy – Dean Akkharaphong Khamkhun
11:30am – 12:30pm	Amulet market tour with university faculty in small groups
12:30pm – 2:00pm	Lunch on own and budget time (about 23 minutes) to walk to meeting point at the Giant (Red) Swing – it looks like a Japanese Shinto shrine entrance gate – it's in front of Wat Sutthat, address listed below
2:00pm	Meet at the Giant Swing (address: 239 Dinso Road, Bang Khun Phrom, Bangkok)
2:00pm – 3:00pm	Tour of the “Buddhist Products” district in the old city of Bangkok with John Johnston, Curator of East Asian Buddhist Art and Senior Fellow at the Center for Buddhist Studies, University of Arizona and currently a Visiting Lecturer at Thammasat University
3:00pm – 3:40pm	Take local long-tail boat from Panfa Leelard Pier to Pratunam Pier (about 25 to 30-minute boat ride), walk 9 minutes from pier to shrine
3:45pm – 4:45pm	Erawan Shrine (most famous of eight shrines around the Ratchaprasong intersection)
	Dinner on own and rest of evening free
Wednesday, March 8	Sri Racha and Pattaya. B Thai Buddhism and Power
Starts at 6:00am	Breakfast at hotel
8:00am – 9:30am	Lecture: Thai Buddhism and Power – Edoardo Siani, Assistant Professor, Department of Asian and North African Studies, Universita Ca' Foscari Venezia

	(anthropologist and expert on Thai Buddhism and politics) (location: hotel meeting space)
9:30am – 11:00am	Bus from Bangkok to Wat Saen Suk (Hell Theme Park)
11:00am – 11:30am	Walking Tour of Wat Saen Suk with Prof. Susanne Kerekes
11:30am – 12:00pm	Drive from Wat Saen Suk to Sri Racha
12:00pm – 2:00pm	Lunch on own in Sri Racha
2:00pm – 3:00pm	Drive from Sri Racha to Sanctuary of Truth in Pattaya
3:00pm – 4:30pm	Sanctuary of Truth
4:30pm – 6:30pm	Drive back to Bangkok
	Dinner on own
	Group Reflection # 2 (Find the prompts on Canvas) Rest break and free time to meet with your group to work on reflection and start working on Intercultural Leadership Exercise Presentation
Thursday, March 9	Wat Bhaddanta Asabharam. B, L Meditation Retreat
Starts at 6:00am	Breakfast at hotel
7:30am – 8:00am	Check out of hotel and luggage storage in hotel (bring only backpack for overnight)
8:00am	Turn in Group Reflection Paragraph #2 via Canvas by 8:00am deadline
8:00am – 9:00am	Lecture: Meditation – Prof. Susanne Kerekes (location: hotel meeting space)
9:00am – 11:00am	Drive from Bangkok to Wat Bhaddanta Asabharam
11:00am	Arrive at Wat Bhaddanta Asabharam
By 12:00pm: Need to be here by noon as they stop serving lunch at noon to the monks	Lunch at monastery (Note: we will be fasting from after lunch until the next morning – see note below about no dinner)
Afternoon/evening	Meditation retreat
	Note: There is no dinner served at the monastery. As part of the meditation protocol, we fast after lunch until the next morning. If you feel this will be problematic for you, please bring your own food/snacks to eat in the privacy of your room in the evening. Our hosts shouldn't see you eating though so please be discreet.
Friday, March 10	Meditation Retreat and Ko Samet Island. B Buddhist Cosmology in Literary Context
4:00am	Wake up
4:30am	Morning meditation
6:30am – 7:30am	End of meditation/breakfast
7:30am – 8:30am	Meet the abbot of the temple, Ajaha Somsak Sorado – Q&A, discussion and farewell
8:30am	Collect belongings, board bus
8:30am – 10:30am	Drive from monastery to Ko Samet Island ferry at Sribanphe Pier
10:30am – 11:00am	Ferry from Sribanphe Pier to Ko Samet Island
11:00am – 12:00pm	Lunch on own
12:00pm – 1:00pm	Lecture: Thai Buddhist Cosmology in Literary Context – Paul McBain, Lecturer of Thai Studies Department at Thammasat University

1:00pm – 4:00pm	Free time/beach time
4:00pm – 4:30pm	Ferry from Ko Samet Island to Sribanphe Pier
4:30pm – 7:00pm	Drive back to Bangkok
7:00pm	Check back into Eastin Grand Hotel Sathorn
	Dinner on own
	Meet with your group to work on Intercultural Leadership Exercise
8:30pm – 9:00pm (flexible)	Meet with Professor Kerekes to discuss Intercultural Leadership Exercise prompts/questions (can be done on earlier bus ride or in hotel lobby with individual groups)
Saturday, March 11	Bangkok. B, L Final Presentations
Starts at 6:00am	Breakfast at hotel
8:00am	Upload any Powerpoint you will be using for your presentation today in Canvas by 8:00am
8:00am – 8:25am	Check out of hotel and luggage storage.
8:30am – 12:00pm	Intercultural Leadership Exercise Presentations (location: hotel meeting space)
12:00pm – 12:15pm	Short break
12:15pm – 12:30pm	Meet in hotel lobby and walk as group from hotel to Suananda restaurant (address: 109 Pan Rd, Khwaeng Silom, Khet Bang Rak, Krung Thep Maha Nakhon, Bangkok)
12:30pm – 2:15pm	Farewell Lunch at Suananda
2:15pm – 10:00pm	Free time and dinner on own
10:00pm	Report back to the hotel to collect luggage and take to bus
10:30pm	Depart hotel via bus for Bangkok airport
1:50am	Group flight departs Bangkok (Qatar Airways) QR 0837 12MAR BKK to DOH 1:50am - 5:15am - 2 hour, 40 minute layover (Qatar Airways) QR 0701 12MAR DOH to JFK 7:55am - 3:45pm
Sunday, March 12	Departure from Bangkok to JFK
3:45pm	Group flight lands at JFK airport (students are responsible for their own transportation back to Philadelphia)