Wat Arun

Wat Arun is named for Aruna, the Indian god of dawn, because King Taksin arrived here at sunrise on an October day in 1767 to establish Thonburi as Siam’s new capital. With its prominent prang (towers), the temple shows a strong Khmer influence. All the prang are ornamentally encrusted with colorful broken porcelain.

Top 10 Features

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Central Prang
The central prang (below) was extended to its current height of 266 ft (81 m) by Rama III (r. 1824–51) and represents Mount Meru, the abode of the gods in Hindu-Buddhist cosmology. It is topped with a thunderbolt, the weapon of the god Indra, who also features in niches on the prang riding the three-headed elephant Erawan.

Ceramic Details
The colorful broken ceramics that cover the prang are an ingenious form of 19th-century recycling. In those days, Chinese trading ships carried broken porcelain as ballast, which when offloaded was used to decorate the prang (center).
Symbolic Levels
The central prang has three symbolic levels. The base stands for Traiphum, all realms of existence in the Buddhist universe; the middle section represents the Tavatimsa, where all desires are gratified; the top denotes Devaphum, six heavens within seven realms of happiness.

Stairs on Central Prang
The steep and narrow stairs up the central prang represent the difficulties humans face when trying to attain a higher level of enlightenment. They lead up to a narrow terrace that offers a sweeping view, but the upper stairway is often closed.

Kinnari
Tucked away in small coves on the second level of the central prang are kinnari, mythical creatures that are half-bird, half-woman. Renowned for their singing, dancing, and poetry, kinnari are just one of the mythical creatures from the Himaphan Forest at the base of Mount Meru.

Mondop
Between each of the four corner prang is an elaborately decorated mondop (altar). Each holds a Buddha statue at key stages of his life – birth (north), meditation (east), preaching his first sermon (south), and entering Nirvana (west).

Decoration of Minor Prang
Representing the four great seas, these smaller prang are also decorated with colorful ceramics. Each prang, supported by demons and monkeys, has a niche with a statue of Phra Pai, god of wind, on a white horse (right).

The Bot
The Buddha image in the bot (ordination hall) was apparently molded by Rama II (r.1809–24) himself, and his ashes are buried in the base of the statue (above). The murals were created during the reign of Rama V (see p34). The entrance is guarded by two giants.

Chinese Guards
Eight sets of steps lead up to the first terrace, and each set is guarded by Chinese figures that may have arrived as ballast on ships along with the porcelain. There are also statues of many mythical creatures scattered on the terrace.

The Rise and Fall of King Taksin
Taksin the Great (r.1768–82) became one of Siam’s most successful warrior kings. He rallied factions of Siamese troops after the fall of Ayutthaya, and waged wars with Cambodia, Laos, and the Malays. By the 1770s he had expanded Siam to its largest-ever extent. But success went to his head and he was eventually ousted in a coup and was executed by being clubbed to death in a velvet sack so that royal blood would not touch the ground.