

The Nop Phra Len Phleng Tradition in Magha Pucha Day (Makha Bucha)

Kamphaeng Phet province is an historically significant area of Thailand. When Sukhothai was the capital city of Siam. Kamphaeng Phet was the first outpost of defense against its enemies. Its historical attractions include old temples, the bastion, moat and the city wall. These sites make Kamphaeng Phet one of the most rewarding places to visit in the whole of Thailand.

Kamphaeng Phet holds an annual major cultural event called *nop phra len phleng*. The event is held on the full moon day in the third Lunar month of Thailand or Magha Pucha Day (Makha Bucha) and is the first major celebration of the Buddhist year. In 1983 the *nop phra len phleng* tradition was revived as a major event. This tradition is keeping on an ancient way of life and custom which Kamphaeng Phet people proudly preserve for the next generation to continue.

During the Sukhothai period, Kamphaeng Phet was a very opulent and powerful city, particularly during the reign of Phra Maha Thammaracha I or King Lithai (Phaya Lithai). Buddhism was already established as the main religion of the kingdom and many gorgeous temples were built or renovated. According to Prince Damrong Rajanubhab and available archeological evidence, in 1900 B.E. King Lithai had a relic of Lord Buddha brought from Sri Lanka and enshrined in the chedi at Wat Phra Borom That (Phra Borom That temple) Nakhon Chum, Mueang district, Kamphaeng Phet province. King Lithai also planted the Buddhist religious tree (bodhi) behind the chedi. The previous chedi originally was a lotus bud pattern and it was changed by order of King Rama V to Phayataka and rebuilt in the Burmese style.

Every year on the full moon day of the third Lunar month, the royal family and people go to worship here together, walking clockwise with lighted candles and incense in hand round the chedi as a religious rite. They call this tradition “Nop Phra”, where “Nop” means Wai or worship and “Phra” mean Buddha so the meaning of “Nop Phra” is to pay homage to Buddha.

In former times transportation was very slow and difficult, using animals such as elephants, horses, cows or buffalos or going on foot. Because of this disciples usually arrived at the chedi of Buddha’s relic in the evening so it was necessary to stay overnight. And when many people stay together, they often created performances games or challenges from each village. Men and women enjoyed singing local songs after they had finished their homage. They called this tradition “Len Phleng” for the meaning of “Len” is play and “Phleng” means song in Thai.

Since the Nop Phra Len Phleng tradition begun Kamphaeng Phet people believe if anybody pays homage to Buddha’s relic and the bodhi tree, they will earn a lot of merit.

Tourists can come to visit this major attraction to fulfill the spirit of merit-making whilst learning about Thai culture. They can also have fun at the heritage sites inside Kamphaeng Phet Historical Park for example Wat Phra Kaeo, Wat Phra Si Iriyabot and Wat Chang Rop. The Kamphaeng Phet Historical Park has been chosen by UNESCO as a World heritage site.