

Note by Walter Williams: When I asked a Thai friend for advice about how to complete my new house I was building in the Maha Sarakham district, this is what he wrote to me.

Here are some info about Blessing a New House in Thailand.
by Tone March 2007

The ceremony of moving into a new house in Thai is called keun ban mai, literally "going up into a new house"; in former times most Thai houses were built on stilts to avoid flooding in the rainy season.

The auspicious time for moving in must first be found. Saturdays are very unlucky, but Sundays are good. Before the auspicious day, all the heavy furniture, such as beds, tables and chairs, are moved in.

At the auspicious hour the owner and his family enter the new house carrying their personal Buddha images, some food and some money. The Buddha images are set up in their new permanent positions - they must always face either East or North. The housewife immediately prepares a meal, even though it is perhaps three o'clock in the morning. This formalises the act of "moving in". The money is brought in order to ensure future prosperity.

A few days later the religious keun ban mai ceremony is held. This is purely Buddhist, and is a blessing of the new home and a house-warming party all in one.

Once again, five, seven, or preferably nine monks are invited. Before they arrive, the white thread known as sai sin will have been draped completely round the compound to keep out evil spirits and consecrate everything inside it.

The monks take their places on cushions placed round the wall, the senior monk on the right. Candles are lit. The ball of white thread is passed from one monk to the next, each holding the thread between the palms of the hands in the wai position.

For perhaps an hour the monks chant. Afterwards the house-owner offers them food. Later everyone kneels in turn before the senior monk, who sprinkles holy water on their heads. One final important rite remains. As the monks prepare to leave, the senior monk anoints every door in the house, and especially the front door, with seven or nine spots of white paste. With that, the ceremony is at an end. After the house has been in use for some time, the owner may choose to put up a miniature spirit house in a corner of the compound, where the chao tee or spirit of the land may live.

NORTHEAST THAILAND

Later, Tone sent another email:

Hi, I found something interesting and wanna give to you. Please spend a little time on this.

Of all the region of Thailand, the northeast is perhaps the least known among foreign visitors, in spite of the fact that it covers almost a third of the country's total area and includes the second largest Thai

city, Khon Kaen. This neglect is changing, however, more and more tourists are beginning to discover the northeast's many unique attractions, both natural and historical. In the 1960s, near the small village of Ban Chiang in Udon Thani province, one of the most exciting chapters in modern archeology began with the accidental discovery of a prehistoric burial site. Subsequent exploration revealed a culture going back to nearly 4,000 B.C. and numbering among its achievements the use of sophisticated bronze metallurgy as well as rice cultivation and beautiful painted pottery. Some of the remarkable Ban Chiang finds are displayed in a museum near the site, and one of the excavations has been preserved to show its different levels. In historical times, between the 9th and 14th centuries A.D., the northeast was part of the great Khmer empire ruled from Angkor, and as a result it contains some of the finest classical Khmer ruins to be seen outside of Cambodia itself. Among the most beautiful are Prasat Hin Phimai, near the provincial capital of Nakhon Ratchasima, which was once linked by a direct road to Angkor, and Phanom Ruang in Buriram province, recently restored by the Fine Arts Department. In all, there are more than 30 Khmer ruins scattered about the region, all of unusual architectural interest. Besides such archaeological sites, the northeast also has a number of spacious national parks and wildlife preserves sure to be on interest to any nature lover. The best known, because of its easy accessibility to Bangkok, is Khao Yai, which covers more than 2,000 square kilometers of forest, grassland, and rolling hills in four provinces and provides shelter for some 200 species of I wildlife, including elephants, tigers, deer, and a wide selection of birds. Phu Kadung, in Loei province, is centered on a mountain topped by a 60-square-kilometer plateau of exceptional natural beauty, while the Phu Khieo Wildlife Preservation Zone in Chaiyaphum province is a royally-initiated sanctuary for a variety of endangered I species. The great Mekong River that forms the border between Thailand and Laos is another notable scenic attraction.

NORTH-EAST and the Khmer Temples. One of the northeast's greatest assets is its hospitable people, who make visitors feel welcome at several memorable festivals during the year. The Elephant Roundup, held every November in Surin province, brings together nearly two hundred of the animals to take part in a display of their skills, with special trains bringing guests from Bangkok for the events. Rocket Festivals, or Boon Bang Fais, are held in a number of provinces, the most famous being in Yasothon in May; enormous home-made rockets are fired at the peak of the lively celebration in the hope of ensuring a plentiful supply of rain for the coming crop. The beautiful Candle Festival, which marks the start of Buddhist Lent in July, attracts people from all over the country to Ubon Ratchathani, where huge, imaginative candles are paraded through the streets of the provincial capital. Northeastern food reflects the influence of neighboring Laos in a number of dishes. As in Laos (and also northern Thailand) glutinous rice is the staple, eaten both as a base for other dishes or as a sweet when steamed in a piece of bamboo with coconut milk and black beans; and such Laotian herbs as dill (called pak chee Lao, or Lao coriander in Thai) turn up as seasoning. A popular regional dish of Lao origin is khanom buang, a thin crispy egg crepe stuffed with shrimp, bean sprouts, and other ingredients. Northeasterners like their food highly seasoned, and regional specialties like laab, made with spicy minced meat or chicken, som tam (green papaya salad), and Gai Yang. (bar B-Q Chicken) Meat is often scarce in villages and freshwater fish and

shrimp are the principal source of protein, sometimes cooked with herbs and spices and sometimes fermented. Thanks to the large numbers of north-eastern who have come to work in Bangkok, food of the region is widely available in the capital.