Ancient Siam is the world’s largest outdoor museum, a 320-hectare “city” containing 116 structures of Thailand’s famous monuments and architectural attractions. The grounds of Ancient Siam correspond roughly to the shape of the kingdom, with the monuments lying at their correct places geographically to the originals. Some of the buildings are life-size replicas of existing or former sites, while others are scaled down.
"Ancient Siam," more commonly known by locals as "Mung Boran" is unquestionably one of Thailand's greatest cultural treasures, reproduced down to the last detail by experts from the National Museum, reproducing Thailand's most famous buildings from the 10th to the 20th centuries. Construction began in 1963 and was completed in 1972. The park was actually designed for Thais, to help them learn their heritage.

The site is so huge, 320 acres, originally intended to be a golf course, that there are a variety of ways to get around, including electric cart you can rent, a guided tour in an open cart, a tour bus and, our favorite bikes-you can rent them or bring your own. Also, there are paved roads and you can drive your car on them.

There are numerous restaurants, snack bars and drink stands along the way.
The Great Hall of Vajradhamma

The Ancient City brings the splendor of the Prasat Thong dynasty with the opening of the Great Hall of Vajra Dhamma. The building enshrines the 28 Buddha statues from Buddha’s previous incarnations along with 10 Buddha statues that were believed to be his future forms. There are also other architectures, such as the pagodas for the 12 astrological signs, pagodas representing the birth year.

Most Thais believe in reincarnation. Although enlightenment and the freedom from suffering may be achieved within a single lifetime, for most it will take many lifetimes.

After death, the soul will leave the present world, travel to heaven and then be returned to the world, as many times as are required for the soul to become “perfect,” in other words a perfect soul becomes “the Buddha.” Its journey back to earth is ended.

Although the vast majority of people in Thailand are Buddhist, religious tolerance and freedom are an important part of the Thai mindset. Other religious groups are treated with kindness and openness, and they make up an important part of Thailand’s population.
Invaribly Thais burn incense, which they believe creates a tranquil mind, and offer flowers, usually lotus blossoms that symbolize reincarnation.

RIGHT: These are the 28 Buddha statues from Buddha's previous incarnations along with 10 Buddha statues that were believed to be his future forms.
These are the pagodas that represent the 12 astrological signs
This is the edifice of the Great Hall, with a tower topped by a symbolic antenna, that transmits the soul to heaven.

The most searing event in Thai history was their defeat in the 18th century by the Burmese. As the Burmese swept east across Siam, the capital of Ayutthaya came under siege. The capital of Ayutthaya survived the 16th century Burmese invasion however, this time the city fell – and at sunset on April 7th 1767, the Burmese finally made it over the city walls and proceeded to destroy the city.

During the battle, the King's wife, Queen Shukothai and her daughter, seeing the king was about to be killed by the Burmese king, rammed her elephant between them and proceeded to engage in hand-to-hand combat with the Burmese king, eventually resulting in the death of both her and her daughter. It is said that upon death her helmet fell off, revealing her long hair and it was only at this moment that the Burmese king realized he had been fighting a woman.

Burmese ruthlessly sacked Ayutthaya. The ensuing massacre reduced many of the city's temples to rubble, leaving a history of cruelty and persecution, but Burmese occupation was short-lived. Siam, supported by the Chinese, forced the Burmese to withdraw from Siam. In the ensuing Siamese civil war, King Taksin's Thonburi forces emerged the victor by mid-1770.

It is said that the Lord Buddha, after achieving Enlightenment, meditated for seven days, protected by the Naga king, who emerged from the underworld, his seven heads are represented by the serpents (Naga) in this sculpture.
Sumeru Mountain is considered the pillar of the world as well as the center as the universe and sits on a column of immense height which plunges to immense depth beneath the sea. It is the residence of a creature possessing all the divergent elements of humans, the gods in the earth, angels and the Buddha. It lives in a castle called Phaichayon Maha Prasat shown below. In the center of the castle stands the heavenly throne.
In the early Rattanakosin era, the Dusit Maha Prasat Palace was an audience hall, where affairs of the state were conducted and royal ceremonies performed. The palace was built by King Rama I in 1806 A.D. The original building is now part of the Grand Palace in Bangkok, a World Heritage site.
Sanphet Prasat Throne Hall served as the reception hall for Queen Elizabeth II. Erected during the reign of King Phra Baromtrai Lokanat, it served as a ceremonial site for the coronation of the Thai kings and other important events as well as the Audience Hall for foreign ambassadors and envoys during the reign of King Narai the Great. Its walls are covered with beautiful murals of the Hindu god Narayana, and are lined with 28 Buddha statues and a private collection of old porcelains and silver and gold nielloware.
A Botanical Garden from Thai Literature

This model is not the recreation of a specific garden but of what a typical Thai garden looked like in the 17th century, with many kinds of trees and flowers mentioned in Thai literature of Sukhothai and Ayutthaya.
Wat Chong Kham from Lampang

Wat Chiang Khong, relocated from Chiang Rai, using traditional carpentry techniques was built with the use of not a single nail. The ancient Khmer-style castle takes you back to the reign of King Suriyavarman I the original built on a 50’ high mound, surrounded by a shady tropical forest.
The original, built on the palace grounds of King V, still stands and is even more serene, if possible standing in the middle of a small pond, surrounded by giant lilies.
Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara

The figure, which can be male or female, embodies the compassion of the Buddha, guarded by seven Naga. It is a figure seen in every Asian culture under different names. Found in the earliest text of Buddhist sacred literature, Lotus Sutra chapter 25. One prominent Buddhist story tells of Avalokitesvara vowing never to rest until he had freed all sentient beings from the pains of life. The sun and moon are said to be born from Avalokitesvara’s eyes, Shiva comes from his brow, Brahma from his shoulders, Narayana from his heart, Sarasvati from his teeth, the winds from his mouth, the earth from his feet, and the sky from his stomach.

The Naga, mythical creatures from the underworld, believed by locals to live in the Mekong river. Thai folklore holds the Phaya Naga to be semi-divine, demi-creatures, which possess supernatural powers as has been described in Buddhist and Hindu cosmology. In Buddhist literature the Nagas were sent by the lord of the underworld to protect Buddha as he meditated and thus are considered guardians.
Before highways became common, Thailand relied on water transportation. Rivers and canals became the most important trade routes for people along the rivers. One result of their industry has been the gradual evolution of the floating food market. It is a reflection of traditional Thai life along the river.
This is a typical boat noodle boat, which you see all the time on all the rivers and in all the land-based markets that abutt a river or canals. In the middle of the boat is a large, cooking gas-heated pot which is divided into three sections, one for the soup, one for water to cook the noodles and the third for the meat stew.

The many pots and buckets you see contain different alternative ingredients, so the seller can offer a menu of considerable variety using only a small space.
The Pavilion of the Enlightened

Possibly the most beautiful of the many beautiful models, it is an affirmation of the kindly and accepting way of Buddhism, which does not claim to be the “only” way to God. The many small pavilions are symbolic of the many ways one can reach enlightenment.
The Pavilion of the Enlightened
A Sala is a public center, used in Buddhist merit-making ceremonies and other social activities, usually built by donation from a private person, demonstrating their devotion but also their wealth. There are many ways to gain merit, which directly gains you benefits in Heaven. For example, if you give a Monk a duck dinner, you get a duck dinner in heaven!

When I learned this I suggested to Apple that we offer a 25,000 ice cream cone voucher and the buyer could give the voucher to the monks and thus get 25,000 delicious Dream Cones gelato scoops in heaven. Apple was not amused.
The Grand Hall was built in the old Sukhothai Kingdom. Nearby are the statues of 4 Buddha images in 4 distinctive gestures, this is one. Known as Phra Si Iriyabot the statues show unique characteristics of the distinguished art in casting the images in Sukhothai, Satchanalai and Kampaeng Phet. The style of architecture can be found nowhere else in Thailand.
Kinnara: In the female form, this creature is a half celestial dancer and a half celestial swan. The female Kinnari symbolizes feminine beauty, grace and cultural accomplishment in singing and dancing. There is also the Shan dance of the Kinnari and Kinnara which is the Thai Yai (Shan) bird dance.
A Yak demon guardian with fangs and a sword, a fearsome warrior from the Thai version of Hindu Ramayana mythology who usually guards royalty stands guard at the Royal Palace in Bangkok.
Buddha was more of a philosopher (which he denied) than a messiah. He claimed he wasn’t a philosopher because he only taught stuff that made sense. His teachings revolved around how one can learn to free one’s self from the pain of life.

He taught the famous “Four Noble Truths” and “Eightfold Path,” which allows people to achieve enlightenment, all intended to liberate people from the anguish of things like greed and desire.

The Buddha said: “I teach only two things to disciples, the nature of suffering and the cessation of suffering.”

“My teaching is like a raft used to cross the river,” Buddha said. On the other side of the river was—contentment, the true “enlightenment.”

During Buddha’s life and for about 800 years after his death, Buddhist temples were severely simple, the only ornament being a circle, symbolic of the wheel of life.

But even though the Buddha embraced the concept of reincarnation, thus implying death is not an end, the truth is people needed something more tangible than a “wheel of life” and slowly they added many of the elements of Hinduism to their Buddhism, creating what we know today as “Thai” Buddhism, with its demons, winged serpents, strange creatures that are composites of humans and other creatures, complete with devils and even a Hell.

But we owe a great debit to Buddha no matter what we believe because the core of his philosophy was, as he said, “like a raft used to cross the river,” not a set of rules on how to get to heaven.