

# A Critical Review of Interpretation Model for Heritage Sites: The Case of Wat Arun in Thailand

By Sompong Amnuay-ngerntra

**Abstract:** Due to the decline of monastery visitation among young domestic visitors, an interpretation plan has been designed to

enrich the visitors' travel experiences. Two divided parts: interpretation model; and interpretation plan attempt to help policy makers of cultural heritage sites enhance their communication ideas and critical analysis on heritage management, in particular the interpretation planning.

The first part investigates significance of interpretation in the context of tourism and a model of interpretation model consisting of 4 major elements: the site/ material object; the interpretation environment; interpretation; and visitors or tourists. These elements are required to critically analyse and integrate in an appropriate way so as to lead to the achievement of interpretation goals and objectives.

Heritage interpretation plan at Wat Arun, in the second part, has been proposed with several potential communication techniques, especially a festival of temple fair, dancing performance, and visitor participative activities.

**Key words:** Interpretation model, heritage site, and interpretation plan

*"Through interpretation, understanding; through understanding, appreciation; through appreciation, protection."  
(Tilden 1957 quoted in Uzzell & Ballantyne 1998: 12)*

## Introduction

Currently, several outstanding Buddhist temples in Bangkok are attractive and visited by most foreign visitors; whereas the popularity of monastery visitation among young domestic people is on the decline. This leads to the critical questions about what causes this problem and how to increase the local visitation (if possible). Interpretation is one of the meaningful solutions to the questions above as it is able to enrich visitors' travel experience and increase the length of visitation at heritage sites. Obviously, effective interpretation planning will be able to enhance the productivity of an interpretation program.

This paper aims to analyse the critical model of interpretation and how an effective interpretation program at Wat Arun or the Temple of Dawn can be developed in relation to the model of interpretation planning. Firstly, the paper explores interpretation definition and its significance. Then, an interpretation

model has been critically analysed with the case of Wat Arun prior to moving the last part, the development of interpretation planning at heritage sites.

## **Part A: A Review of Interpretation Model**

### **Definition of Interpretation**

There is no single definition of interpretation that has been adopted by most practitioners. However, Tilden (1977), one of the most widely quoted academics in heritage interpretation literatures, cited that interpretation is the revelation of a larger truth that lies behind any statement of fact. In addition, interpretation should capitalise on mere curiosity for the enrichment of the human mind and spirit. However, most heritage management organisations have tailored it to serve their own needs, resulting in a similar definition across the world. For example, Archer and Wearing (2002) define interpretation in the context of managing Australian national parks as a means for communicating information, stories, values and ideas to assist people in understanding their relationship with the environment. Similarly, Interpretation Australia Association (1995 quoted in Hall and McArthur 1998: 166) defines interpretation as “*a means of communicating ideas and feelings which helps people enrich their understanding and appreciation of their world, and their role within it*”.

### **Significance of interpretation to all stakeholders in the tourism industry.**

According to Hall and McArthur (1998: 168), practitioners in the tourism industry can benefit an effective process of communication, as interpretation is able to help:

- Differentiate their tourism products from more mainstream products;
- Attract higher-yield clientele;
- Increase client satisfaction;
- Contribute to an ethical position held by the operation;
- Increase guide satisfaction; and
- Gain more favourable treatment from heritage managers.

For tour operators, interpretation can be used as a value-added component, especially for the niche market, which provides access to high-yield, markets (Commonwealth Department of Tourism 1994 quoted in

Hall and McArthur 1998). Certainly, in order to sustain competitive advantages, tour operators are able to differentiate themselves from other competitors by

## INTERPRETATION AND HERITAGE TOURISM

employing high quality tourist guides who can be history expert about the sites visited.

Effective interpretation can encourage tourists or visitors to travel knowledgeably while discouraging many of the problems associated with mass tourism (Jamieson 2001). Similarly, interpretation contributes to the enrichment of a visitor's experience. Also, interpretation can form a central component of raising community awareness and support for heritage sites and how they should be managed.

### **Significance of interpretation from a heritage site manager's perspective**

A primary objective of a heritage interpretative program is to enrich experiences of visitors by building their awareness, appreciation and understanding of the range of natural and cultural values inherent in sites. Interpretation also allows heritage site managers to educate visitors on the impacts of their use and encourage appropriate behaviour while visiting a heritage site (McArthur and Hall 1996; Moscardo 1996; Hall and McArthur 1998; and Archer and Wearing 2002).

### **Interestingly**

enough, for the heritage sustainability, effective interpretation is a productive tool to preserve fragile/vulnerable sites by relieving crowding and congestion, altering visitor behaviour, either directly through information or indirectly through fostering visitor appreciation of the sites. This can create public support for conservation of built heritage sites through positive visitor experiences (Moscardo 1996, and Jamieson 2001).

Jamieson (2001) agrees with Tilden (1977) that interpretation is the art of telling the story of a community. All five senses, if possible, should be used to enhance the experience of the visitor's environment and good interpretation should not inform all details, rather it should encourage visitors to inspire further exploration.

Figure 1: Model of Interpretation

Interpretation Environment

### **Dimension I: Pre-knowledge**

- Media
- Education (Formal and informal)
- Guidebook etc.

## SOMPONG AMNUAY-NGERNTRA

- Research and knowledge formation
- Memory, myth, history, stories etc.

Object/Site

Tourists/

## Interpretation

Visitors

Knowledge (Content)

Semiotic Theory

**Communication**

Cognitive Learning Theory

Media Theory

Dimension 2: Knowledge at the sites

- Layout or design of site/attraction
- Display of objects
- Ambience/atmosphere of site
- Visitor participation
- Number of visitors

Dimension 3: Post-visitation Context

- Additional knowledge to recall heritage values
- Impacts of post-visitation context

*Source:* Adapted from Staiff, R. (2002). *Heritage and Tourism Interpretation*.

Bangkok: Silpakorn University, p.14.

### **A Model of Interpretation and Heritage Sites**

A model is the representation of a more complex component engaged in the heritage site development. Understanding the model of Interpretation can help the site managers represent, communicate ideas about, and enhance critical perspectives on heritage management, in particular the interpretation planning (both cultural heritage and nature- based heritage sites).

According to Staiff (2002), the fundamental aim of interpretation is to bridge the gap between form and content. The form is the site or object, which is viewed by visitors, whereas the content is critical information pertaining to the great tower that has been designed or shaped for a visitor viewing the site. However, it is challenging for the site managers to make visitors understand, appreciate, and conserve the heritage site.

## INTERPRETATION AND HERITAGE TOURISM

In order to effectively discuss a model of heritage interpretation, information of Wat Arun will be useful to analyse the critical interpretation model.

### **Historical Background of Wat Arun**

Wat Arun, commonly known by foreign visitors as the Temple of Dawn, is one of Bangkok's outstanding tourist attractions. The temple is internationally famous for her fascinating 67-meter high Khmer style tower (*prang*) surrounded by 4 minor towers, which are located on Thon Buri bank of the Chao Phraya River. The main tower appears in all the tourist brochures and becomes part of the Tourism Authority of Thailand's trademark today. According to the French map made in the reign of King Narai (1656-1688), it can be seen that the temple has been existing in Ayutthaya period. Wat Arun was registered by the Fine Arts Department as National Historical Site since 1949.

Chronically, the temple was formerly known as Wat Makok, and renamed "Wat Jaeng" by King Tak Sin who was on the way to survey his new capital site and arrived at the temple at dawn. The king moved his capital to Thonburi after Ayutthaya had been completely destroyed and the Burmese were familiar with all the major routes to Ayutthaya. If Ayutthaya remained as the capital of Siam, it would be very difficult to defend should the Burmese attack again in the future.

Wat Arun or the Temple of Dawn, one of Bangkok's major landmarks located on Thonburi bank of the Chao Phraya River, was reconstructed in the reign of King Rama II (1809-1824 A.D.)

Wat Jaeng was the palace temple in the reign of King Tak Sin. This means that the temple has no resident monks, like Wat Mahathat in Sukhothai and Wat Pra Sri Sun Petch in Ayutthaya. The Emerald Buddha image was housed here, after he was recaptured from Laos, before being moved to Wat Phra Kaew in the Grand Palace. When Bangkok became the new capital, Wat Jaeng no longer served as the palace temple; therefore, Buddhist monks have been allowed to reside again. The temple renovation was made in the reign of King Rama II (1809-1824), who built the main chapel, the preaching hall and other monastery buildings. Additionally, he renamed it "Wat Arunatchatharam" and later, King Rama IV changed the name to "Wat Arunratchawaram".

### **The Relationship of King Rama II and Wat Arun**

King Rama II (1809-1824) followed in his father, King Rama I's footsteps in many military campaigns and experienced warfare. Fortunately, Siam in his reign was peaceful and prosperous because Burma, Siam's great enemy, got the conflict and was in trouble with Britain; therefore, King Rama II was able to

## SOMPONG AMNUAY-NGERNTA

devote his time to literature works. The king, himself, was versatile and interested in fine arts. This was a golden age for renaissance fine arts, literature, sculpture, and music. Additionally, the ashes of King Rama II were interred in the pedestal of the principal Buddha image at Wat Arun by order of his son, King Mongkut. Likewise, the door panel at Wat Suthat was carved by himself as well.

*During his reign, there were many poets and the noted one was Sunthon Phu, who was one of Thailand's greatest poets. The king was skilled in music by inventing "the fiddle of three strings". He composed and played a beautiful song. The song was named "Buran Loy Fa", meaning the moon floating in the sky and was the song from his dreams. It is still popular today. According to the Tourism Authority of Thailand ([http://newsroom.tat.or.th/event\\_calendar/culture/1081.asp](http://newsroom.tat.or.th/event_calendar/culture/1081.asp)), King Rama II was internationally acclaimed as a World Heritage Person by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in 1968.*

According to the diagram in Figure 1, the interpretation model consists of 4 major elements: the site/ material object; the interpretation environment; interpretation; and visitors or tourists. Details of these elements can be discussed below.

**The site or material object** is viewed by visitors. A tourist site with strong attraction is called a "tourist icon". For the case study, the tourist icon of Wat Arun is the great tower (prang) located on the Thonburi bank of the Choa Phraya River, which is attractive to visitors. Staiff (2002) cited that a model of tourist attraction consists of sight, markers and tourists. What can make Wat Arun attractive can be analysed, as follows:

- **Aesthetic value:** The unique Khmer architectural style pagoda, which is slim and substantially large base with a fish net form. This is a modified Khmer tower found in early Rattanakosin (Bangkok) period only. The setting location next to the river provides a spectacular picturesque view for visitors at sunset, even the name of the site is "Dawn". The tower or *prang* are covered with pieces of porcelain, which Chinese boats coming to Bangkok used as ballast.

The main prang, steep steps lead to the tow terraces that form the base of the tower. The different layers, or heavens, are supported by *Kinnari*, a mythical creature half human-half bird, and frightening demons. Pavilions on the first platform contain statues of Lord Buddha at the most important stage of his life, while on the second terrace four statues of the Hindi Indra god rides on Erawan, a three headed elephant.

- **Historical value:** Wat Arun was the palace temple in the reign of King Tak Sin. This means that it is the most important monastery and has no residential

## INTERPRETATION AND HERITAGE TOURISM

areas for monks. In addition, it still served as the former house of the Emerald Buddha, Thailand's most sacred Buddha image, prior to moving to the Grand Palace in 1785.

- **Heritage value:** Currently, Wat Arun is the last destination for the Royal Barge Procession where the King has presented new monastic robes (*kratin*) to Buddhist monks living here at the end of the rainy season. Apart from the great tower, the main chapel as well as the principal Buddha image at Wat Arun also possess heritage value as the face of the Buddha was modelled by King Rama II. Additionally, a variety of plants and flowers written in King Rama II's literature have been grown here as well.
- **Symbolic value:** Wat Arun is a landmark of Bangkok. The temple also represents the royal monastery of King Rama II, who mainly reconstructed the temple. Therefore, many parts of the temple such as the central gable of the main chapel, decorations on the gates, and the window were decorated with Garuda (mystical bird) on Naga (mystical serpent). This is the royal emblem of King Rama II.
- **Familiarity:** The temple is one of the most popular tourist attractions among foreign visitors. This popularity can be shown in any guidebook or travel magazine. The picture of the great prang at Wat Arun is also part of the logo or trademark of the Tourism Authority of Thailand.

### 2. The Interpretation Environment includes three dimensions

1. **The socio-cultural context of interpretation** that visitors perceive from off-site. This pre-knowledge prior to visiting the site/object is accumulated from all sources of learning such as education, working experience, media, word of mouth, guidebook, and myth. Pre-knowledge substantially helps visitors understand and appreciate the site/object visited.
2. **The specific visual context** within which the site/object is viewed in-site. This visual context requires integrated setting factors such as layout, décor, or design of the site/object, display of the object, and ambience/ atmosphere at the site. Climate with high temperature, in Thailand, is the major visitation barrier affecting the enriched travel experiences. In addition, visitor participation and visitor carrying capacity also contribute to the enriched interpretation of the heritage sites.
3. **The post-visitation context** that visitors perceive after visitation. Although both socio-cultural and visual contexts contribute to the enriched travel experiences mainly at the site, they are not sufficient to influence visitor behaviour and cognition to protect the heritage site. Likewise, unless the post-visitation context has been continued, understanding and appreciation

## SOMPONG AMNUAY-NGERNTRA

of the visitors will fade down after visitation. Therefore, in order to encourage visitors to take actions, it is crucial and critical for the site managers to provide the post-visitation context in accordance with the interpretation objectives. The post-visitation context is able to recall visitors and contribute to the heritage site conservation when required. Also, post-visitation context and its impacts are critical issues required to further research.

**3. Interpretation**, as an activity, is situated within the overall environment or context. Interpretation is made up of two critical parts: knowledge (content) and communication, required for site managers to take an account.

1. **Knowledge or Content**: what is being communicated to target visitors. Staiff (2002) cited that the knowledge and content is a critical issue required to further research. For any heritage interpretation plan, it is important to analyse the content of heritage site so as to identify the effective theme of the interpretation project, enriched message delivered to the target audience, right visitors or tourists, and productive communication technique. Refer back to the case study, the knowledge or content has been analysed from the site resources, which already identified in the site or object.
2. **Communication**: how the content is being transmitted to the target visitors effectively. There are several types of communication technique which possess both strengths and weaknesses. Apparently, communication technique, which is frequently used at the cultural heritage sites in Thailand, is in the form of interpretation center, brochures, maps, heritage trails, guiding, display panels, display cases, festivals, performance, audio-visual interpretation, multi-media shows, and light and sound displays. It is critical to think about which type of communication technique can best achieve the goals or objectives of an interpretation project with values for money: high productivity but small numbers of resources consumed.

In order to identify the productive communication technique, the site manager should ensure that these following factors are integrated in an appropriate way.

- Target audience;
- Number of visitors;
- Access of visitors: through tour operators or visit the site themselves;
- Traffic flow of visitors;
- Scale of the heritage site;
- Theme and objectives of the interpretation project;



## INTERPRETATION AND HERITAGE TOURISM

- Level of community participation;
- Level of community power & ability; and
- The project resources such as budget, workforce, expertise in producing the communication technique, and time.

**4. Visitors or target tourists** are whom we want to visit. Apparently, it is important to conduct market research (e.g. through interview, observation, and questionnaires) so as to obtain useful and productive information about visitors for ensuring interpretation productivity. Demographic characteristics and psychographic characteristics are most typical criteria for audience. The major demographic characteristics are age, education level and the country of origin. However, understanding demographic attributes are superficial and not effective as the psychographic ones which reflect more personal traits about visitors, such as their motivation, perceptions, and expectation for undertaking an activity, or their attitude to, level of interest in and understanding of a topic (McArthur & Hall, 1996).

It is critical and crucial for the site managers to have scientific knowledge of what causes visitation, such knowledge can be more effective with marketing. Heritage site marketing is basically intended to influence people to come, visit particular heritage site and consume particular brand of services. Meanwhile, ineffective marketing does not deal with the cause of events but with irrelevant behaviour (Crompton 1979).

Moscardo (1996), has proposed a mindfulness model of interpretation which is a valuable concept in understanding how visitors respond to interpretation at heritage sites. Setting factors and visitor factors are combined to determine whether they are mindful visitors; visitors who are active, interested, questioning and capable of reassessing the way they view the world.

Setting factors include exhibits and displays, guided tours, signs, maps, guidebooks, brochures and walks. However, it is suggested that other setting elements also contribute to enriched visitor experience. These are weather, décor, design of sites, layout, ambience, atmosphere of site, and number of visitors.

Visitor factors include familiarity with the place and with the heritage site in general, motivation for the visit and companions. However, it is suggested that visitors' knowledge, background and their participation also influence their mindfulness as well.

## Part B: Interpretation Plan: The case of Wat Arun

It has been accepted that productive strategic planning will help the site managers to manage effectively resources required for implementation, and provide essential background for feedback via monitoring and evaluation.

According to the Figure 2 “Key steps for the interpretation planning”, there are 5 inter-related stages in interpretation planning: policy & planning; strategic planning; development of the program; implementation of the program; and evaluation of the program. Staiff (2002: 34) cites that the critical issue for implementing the interpretation planning is to view the planning as “*a dynamic process of consultation, negotiation, integration, and review*”. The interpretation program of the Wat Arun case will be explained in accordance with the interpretation planning (as shown in Figure 2.)

### Policy and Planning

Currently, Wat Arun has been one of Bangkok’s outstanding tourist attractions among foreign visitors who usually spend 30-minute leisure time at the heritage site. Visiting Wat Arun is included in the *Klong* or canal tour, which visitors can enjoy the unique, rustic, and fascinating lifestyle of people living next to the waterway. Obviously, the foreign visitors, both group tours and independent travellers (FIT), easily access the temple by long tailed tourist boat or ferry at *Tha Tien* pier. The temple is overcrowded, particularly in the morning by most Asian visitors, mainly from Japan, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea; whereas there are more Westerners visiting the site in the afternoon.

Unfortunately, Wat Arun is rarely visited by young local people, except the national Buddhist holidays. Also, these people hardly realise the value of heritage significance as a result from the increase of Westernised influence. For instance, few local people realise the significance of *Maghabucha* day, (the third lunar month in commemoration of the Great Assembly of 1,250 Buddhist monks who unexpectedly attended the meeting), which is held annually in February. Probably, what they know is only the national public holiday. Rather, they pay more attention to the 14<sup>th</sup> February of Valentine’s day, which is massively promoted by private enterprises for commercial purpose.

#### Stage 1. Policy and Planning

- Identify the goal or mission statement of interpretation program.
- Identify stakeholders.
- Identify decision-makers.
- Identify objectives of interpretation program.

## INTERPRETATION AND HERITAGE TOURISM

**Stage 2. Strategic Planning**

- Identify resources, in terms of time, budget, human resources, experience, technological equipment, and so on.
- Identify target audience, in terms of demographic and psychographic characteristics.
- Analyse uncontrollable external environments which are likely to impact the interpretation program such as the change of economic, social, cultural, political, legal, and technological environments.

**Stage 3. Development of the Program**

- Identify theme and concept of the interpretation program.
- Structure the content.
- Identify communication techniques.
- Design an integrated visitor experience.
- Devise a marketing strategy for the proposed interpretation program.
- Devise an organisational structure to organise and run the program.

**Stage 4. Implementation of the Interpretation Program**

- Design and produce a draft program.
- Review draft design and production against the decision made.
- Produce the products and implement the program.

**Stage 5. Evaluation of the Interpretation Program.**

- Ensure that all stakeholders involved in the program understand the rationale and the nature of the evaluation.
- Ensure that the evaluation can be assessed by both quantitative and qualitative criteria.
- Ensure that policies and objectives of the program are appropriate.
- Ensure that resources are allocated and used within the program.
- Ensure that the design, the production and the implementation of the program is appropriate for the target audiences.

## SOMPONG AMNUAY-NGERNTRA

**Mission Statement**

The planning project of the interpretation program aims to present all precious values of cultural heritage of Wat Arun in enhancing local people for their understanding, appreciation, and preserving the cultural heritage of this royal monastery.

**Interpretation Program Objectives:**

1. To build local people awareness and take pride in cultural heritage especially literature and traditional performing arts through rustic temple fair.
2. To encourage local young people to preserve their traditional performing arts through active participation in Siamese literature and performing arts contest.
3. To raise funds through public-private sponsors to improve quality of existing brochures, maps, signs, and interpretation center at Wat Arun.

**Site Objective:**

1. To provide a location where visitors can enjoy the aesthetic and historic value of the great *prang* at Wat Arun.
2. To provide a location where visitors can enjoy the value of a traditional temple fair.
3. To provide a location where visitors can watch traditional performing arts.
4. To encourage young local visitors to participate in a literature contest.

**Stakeholders who decide on interpretation planning**

- Management team of Wat Arun
- Experts in the fields of architecture, history, literature, music and performing arts from the Department of Fine Arts.
- Local communities who reside near the site.
- The private firm who organises special events.

By working with experts and stakeholders who have diverse perspectives, however, all stakeholders can be presented and a holistic vision of the cultural heritage can be presented to visitors as well as local public.

## INTERPRETATION AND HERITAGE TOURISM

### Theme of Interpretation Program

According to McArthur and Hall (1996), interpretative content at the heritage sites must contain four components: reference to the

heritage itself; the interest of visitors; the interest of heritage management; and the interest of the interpreter. Therefore, it is suggested that the theme of Wat Arun should be related to highly symbolic incidents in the reign of King Rama II, who reconstructed the great tower and major parts of the temple. Furthermore, all fine arts in his reign were prosperous and well-supported by the King, who was devout and keen to literature and the arts.

It is suggested that “When the nostalgic history comes

alive” should be the theme of the interpretation program, which can illustrate the impressive period of all fine arts in the reign of King Rama II, the glory era of Thai architecture, literature, sculpture, and performing arts. This theme will help the visitors to be able to remember and understand as a result of time they spent at the site. Whereas, “Wat Arun Festival 1809 A.D.” and “Glory of Siamese Arts” can be major events to support the theme, according to Wat Arun Preservation Project (<http://www.watarun.org/projecteng.html>).

### Determine the Financial Resources

Barrow (<http://www.heritageinterpretation.org.uk/journals/jic-fina.html>) says that both public and private sectors play the significant role in sponsoring the financial resources. The public sectors are increasingly interested in helping form trusts and voluntary partnership organisations which can attract charitable finance and volunteer input. Likewise, the government sectors can support the interpretation program, in terms of mutual sponsorship. Drawing together interests which span education, conservation, and tourism development can lead to innovative ways of funding and organising the interpretation program. Possibly, the interpretation management at Wat Arun can generate income from these following possibilities:

- Rental income from office space;
- Catering, either through franchise or direct operation;
- Handicraft shops, either through rental income or direct operation;
- Entry charge to special light & sound presentation/events;
- Sponsorship of displays or events;
- Volunteer time, from universities & colleges to help save staff costs; and
- Car park charges.

## SOMPONG AMNUAY-NGERNTA

Interpretation program can be expensive to run if they do not foresee the hidden cost. To protect the interpretation program from any financial failure, it is suggested to consider these following required costs.

- Staff salaries both full-time and temporary employees.
- Marketing and publicity.
- Staff training.
- Travel and vehicles.
- Insurance.
- Heat, light and other services.
- Security.
- Cleaning.
- Display maintenance.

### **Target Audience**

Most visitors at Wat Arun are foreign visitors; whereas most young people have never been there and hardly realised the values of the cultural heritage significance. Therefore, this interpretation program is designed to enhance national pride and support the heritage preservation of the site.

The type of visitors will help determine the way heritage sites are presented. The primary target audiences are local people (both male and female), who are interested in the nostalgic atmosphere of the temple fair and traditional performing arts, especially literature, drama, play, and music. It can be seen that the theme of the interpretation program identifies target audiences, whose motivations and interest are related to the site.

The secondary target audience is high-school and university students, who were informed about the temple fair in the past but have no opportunity to experience and enjoy the aesthetic values. Interpretation for the secondary target audiences should stimulate their active participation in the theme. This information is not handed out in a passive manner but rather incorporates a question and answer segment as well as discussion and explanation. Both target groups are in Bangkok and its vicinity, which are easily accessible to Wat Arun by express boat or ferry.

International tourists are not the target audiences for this interpretation program as most of them have limited background knowledge in Thai cultural fine arts. However, the interpretation program is a value-added bonus, which the foreign visitors can experience and appreciate aesthetic values of the site. Consequently, this will increase the length of their visitation at the site.

## Potential Communication Techniques

### Festival of Wat Arun Temple Fair

A festival is a spectacular way for tourists to learn about a community because it appeals to all the senses and often celebrates important cultural events. This festival should be one week duration held on 24 February annually, which is King Rama II's birthday as well as Thailand's National Fine Arts Day. The festival incorporates rituals, ceremonies and other examples of living heritage such as food, religion, dancing, music, play, contests, and handicrafts. The temple fair will encourage visitors to learn about the myths, religious meaning, and cultural heritage values behind a ceremony.

### Performance

Activities and rituals such as large formal dinners with traditional food, drink, seating and utensils can give visitors an idea of what life was like in the reign of King Rama II. These performances can also serve to fund and support cultural traditions. These are possible performances, which the management teams must take into consideration in accordance with the operation budget.

Khon, the masked dance drama of the royal court and originated from an open-air performance during a royal ceremony. *Ramakian* is the most popular Khon title in which most of the movements are performed by legs rather than arms. The movements tell the story and express the characters' inner feelings. There are four major characters: human male, human female, demons, and monkeys. Other titles including *Sung Thong*, *Kawi*, *Mani Pichai*, and *Krai Thong* can be performed and interpreted for visitors as well. These were favorite dance dramas created in the reign of King Rama II.

- Lakhon, a form of dance drama, using a great variety of arm and hand movements and accompanied by music and songs.
- Thai music: string, wind, and percussion instruments.

Sample a Long Drum folk dance, part of active participation in preservation of Thai fine arts.

*(Courtesy of Gerald Cubitt)*

Visitors can be stimulated to preserve the performing arts through active participation and high-school and university students, the secondary target group, can participate in these activities, as follows:

- Poem making contest;
- Traditional dancing contest;

## SOMPONG AMNUAY-NGERNTRA

- Traditional music contest;
- Wat Arun photo contest;
- Intellectual game testing background knowledge of Wat Arun and bibliography of King Rama II, and
- Intellectual debate about interesting issues of Wat Arun and King Rama II.

These participative activities should be classified for both high-school level and undergraduate categories. Rewards can be both honorary certificate and plaque, and monetary incentive for educational support. Meanwhile, the referee working committee should be experts from the Department of Fine Arts, high-school teachers in Thai Studies, and experienced instructors from Performing Arts College.

### **Brochures**

Brochures are the easiest and least expensive way that visitors can get information or details of the interpretation program. The brochures will tell visitors what to see, where to go, and why activities are significant to Wat Arun and King Rama II. Likewise, the brochures should illustrate and support the theme and objectives of an interpretation program.

### **Maps**

Brochures and maps often accompany each other or each can stand alone. The maps can show visitors important elements of the temple fair such as highlights of the temple fair, the venue of performances held, visitor center, parking areas, public toilets, and so forth.

### **Display Panels**

Display panels are two-dimensional signs, which can contain interpretative information, maps, photographs and graphics. A number of criteria for choosing a sign system includes: the location of the signs, the scale of Wat Arun and shape, the type of illustrations, the nature of the maps and text, concerns about vandalism and the kind of panel to adopt.

### **Interpretation Center**

An interpretation center can bring together all types of interpretations and presentations mentioned above, along with additional static and dynamic displays. What should be displayed in the interpretation center are a collection of the great *prang* in different periods of time, a collection of traditional performing arts, information of the royal barge procession and Wat Arun, and a bibliography of King Rama II and his major achievements.



## INTERPRETATION AND HERITAGE TOURISM

### Guiding

Distinguished guest speakers can draw visitors' attention. It is suggested to invite the guest speakers to share their past experience, and knowledge so as to raise young people's awareness of the values of Siamese cultural heritage at Wat Arun. However, it is important to ensure that these celebrities understand the theme and objectives of the interpretation program.

### Web sites

This is an exceptional powerful off-site medium for interpretative information relating to Wat Arun. Visitors can receive the information by accessing the Internet anywhere and anytime. The operational expenditure is relatively low compared to most electronic media. Furthermore, the site managers can check the feedback and evaluate the interpretation program. However, to keep drawing visitors' attention, it is suggested to keep all information fresh, updated, and interesting. The design of web sites should illustrate the unique architectural identity of the great *prang*.

### How to market the interpretation program?

Several means have been suggested to publicise interesting activities of the temple fair. Due to the limited marketing budget, publicity should be substantially used for this project. This publicity can be

done by

- Making an invitation letter to both high-schools and universities, near Wat Arun, explain the program objectives and invite teachers, instructors, and students to participate in the interpretation program.
- Making a press release to mass media- both print media (e.g. daily newspaper, travel and heritage magazines) and electronic media such as radio, television, Internet, and Automatic Telling Machine (ATM).

### Evaluation

Objectives should be re-evaluated constantly, annually at the very least. There is little use in implementing an interpretation program if it is not monitored regularly. It is important to find out what elements of the program visitors enjoy and why, and which ones do not achieve their interpretation objectives. Were the venue and time convenient? Were the performances too long? Were the contest well-organised. If not why? It is suggested to modify the program accordingly. Interpretation style may need to be adjusted to achieve the program's objectives, and checked to ensure objectives are logical, reasonable,

## SOMPONG AMNUAY-NGERNTA

and productive. The evaluation can be done through dependable statistics (number of admission tickets), observation, interviewing all stakeholders, and questionnaires.

## Conclusion

Understanding a critical model of interpretation will lead the site managers to the betterment of communication ideas as well as critical perspectives on heritage management, in particular the interpretation planning. Such a model consists of material object, interpretation environment, and visitors. The interpretation environment, which is composed of 3 dimensions: pre-knowledge context; visual-site context; and post-visitation context, is the critical component required to integrally analyse the key content of the site and communication technique delivering to visitors. As Staiff (2002) mentions that effective implementation of the interpretation program is a dynamic process, which requires consultation, negotiation, integration, and review from all stakeholders so as to lead to the achievement of interpretation goals and objectives.

## References

- Archer, D. & Wearing, S. (2002). "Interpretation and Marketing as Management Tools on National Parks: Insights from Australia", *Journal of Leisure Property* (online). 2 (1), 29-39. Available from [http://lion.muic.ac.th/SquirÖ/red\\_body.php?\\_mailbox=INBOX&\\_passed\\_id=106&strMessage=31&show\\_more=](http://lion.muic.ac.th/SquirÖ/red_body.php?_mailbox=INBOX&_passed_id=106&strMessage=31&show_more=) (Accessed 20 Jan, 2003).
- Barrow, G. "Visitor Centres: Financial Planning and Management Issues" *Journal Article of Association for Heritage Interpretation* (online). Available from <http://www.heritageinterpretation.org.uk/journals/jic-fina.html> (Accessed 22 Jan, 2003).
- Crompton, J. (1979). "Motivations for Pleasure Vacation", *Annals of Tourism Research*. 6: 408-424.
- Hall, C.M. & McArthur, S. (1998). *Heritage Management: An Integrated Approach*, London: The Stationary Office.
- Jamieson, W. (2001). *Community Tourism Destination Management: Principles and Practices*, published by CUC UEM Project, Prathumthani, Thailand.
- McArthur, S. & Hall, C.M. (1996). *Heritage Management in Australia & New Zealand*, 2nd edn., Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Moscardo, G. (1996). "Mindful Visitors: Heritage and Tourism". *Annals of Tourism Research*. 23 (2), 376-397.
- Staiff, R. (2002). *Heritage and Tourism Interpretation*. Bangkok: Silpakorn University, Tilden, F. (1977).
- Interpreting Our Heritage*, 3rd edn., Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Tourism Authority of Thailand (online), available: [http://newsroom.tat.or.th/event\\_calendar/culture/1081.asp](http://newsroom.tat.or.th/event_calendar/culture/1081.asp). (Accessed 20 Jan, 2003).
- Wat Arun Preservation Project (online), available:

## INTERPRETATION AND HERITAGE TOURISM

<http://www.watarun.org/projecteng.html>. (Accessed 10 Jan, 2003).

Uzzell, D. & Ballantyne, R. (1998). *Contemporary Issues in Heritage and Environmental Interpretation*. London: The Stationery Office.

---

### About the author

**Sompong Amnuay-ngerntra** is currently Assistant Program Director for Travel Industry Management at Mahidol University International College, Mahidol University. He is also Head of Tourism Management Concentration.

Prior to joining MUIC in January 2000, Mr. Amnuay-ngerntra was the Head of Tourism and Hospitality Management (International Program) at Rangsit University, Bangkok, for two years.

Academically, he is now a doctoral candidate in Architectural Heritage Management and Tourism at Silpakorn University, Bangkok. He obtained a Master Degree in International Tourism Management from Southern Cross University, Australia, and a Bachelor Degree in Journalism and Mass Communications from Thammasat University, Thailand.

Mr. Amnuay-ngerntra has edited two textbooks: *Managing Package Tourism: A Thai Perspective* (2003) and *Travel Agency Management: A Thai Perspective* (2003) in press. Additionally, he also co-authored a book on *Tourism Business Management* (2002) and has participated in a number of international academic conferences. His research interests are cultural heritage management as well as tourism business management. He also has an extensive experience in providing academic consulting services to both public and private institutes namely the Office of the Civil Service Commission, Ministry of the Prime Minister's Office, Rangsit University, and Payub University. Similarly, he has been invited as a guest speaker to several universities including Ramkhamhang, Walailak, Rajchapak Chankasem, and Rangsit.

In collaboration with the Tourism Authority of Thailand he has run three public courses namely the Tourist Guide Training Project and the Refreshment Project for Unemployed Graduates.

Mr. Amnuay-ngerntra has more than 8 years of work experience in Thai tourism industry. As a registered English-French tourist guide, he has worked for Travel East, Tropic Asia Tours, and Asian Tours Center. Mr. Amnuay-ngerntra is committed to ensuring the highest levels of customer satisfaction and his professional duties have included full responsibilities for international high profile guests to Thailand such as the former Prime Minister of France, Jacques Chirac. He also has hands on hospitality experience from the Royal Orchid Sheraton Hotel and Tower, Bangkok.