



# LIVE LESS ORDINARY

Contemporary Lifestyle and Travel by Allan and Farfan Wilson

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## X2 Vibe Buriram: An Oasis in Isaan

by Allan Wilson

I am not surprised if you have never heard of a Buriram, as until recent recent years it has been as obscure as every other far-flung city of Isaan. But with a recent upsurge in cultural and historical tourism in the northeastern region, and a rather ingenious strategy to differentiate Buriram as Thailand's "City of Sports", this once forgettable city has become a dynamic and exciting new addition to Thailand's tourist landscape. And with this unlikely upsurge has come the lesser found luxuries of this region, and the kicker is that luxury here is easily affordable to the average tourist in Isaan. So we therefore make the most of it at the [X2 Vibe Buriram](#), a slick and savvy haven of style, where our guestroom opens out directly to the poolside (check video below) for cocktails and relaxed evenings after our days out exploring the city's rural surroundings. As, for hundreds of kilometers in every direction, there's otherwise pretty much nothing but rice fields, which gives the X2 Vibe and Buriram the ideal vantage point for exploring the ancient attractions and the undiluted old-world cultures of Isaan. And while the hotel would be four-stars on an international scale, it feels way beyond this locally in Isaan, where experiences like these are few and far between.





## The 4K Restaurant

I've spent enough time in Isaan now to know how hard it is to find decent western food, and while I occasionally do follow the expat recommendations, they almost always fail to inspire. But we are otherwise spoilt for choice at the 4K Restaurant, for example their enticing Charcoal Burger, yet the one time I find an exciting international menu in Isaan, I turn it down, as we will soon have burgers galore during our next stint in the U.K. a week ahead. Otherwise the entire menu is exciting and high-end, and I make the most of the provincial interpretations, given they are rarely found on any typical tourist menu. So we go with the Miang Kham, which is a bit like tapas taster set, with cha plu leaf wraps and bites of quinessential Thai flavours with chillies, garlic, lime and shallot. Only at the 4K Restaurant the accompanying Khanom Jeen (rice noodles) are blue, having been coloured by Dok Ang Chan (butterfly pea flowers), to match the theme of the hotel, and the local Buriram colours. These also come served with a variation of fried salmon, a peanut and chilli dip, as well as a rich and spicy red curry of New Zealand muscles. All which are surprisingly new to both of us. It's also hard to visit Isaan without indulging in the fresh water fish (pla nin – tilapia) which are fried and served in a hot and sour "yum" salad. It definitely makes for memorable eating, and are just the start of an exciting and adventurous Buriram style menu at the 4K Restaurant.



# The Unlikely City of Buriram

There is almost an unbelievable lease of life in Buriram due to big ideas, and bigger investments, in a somewhat genius plan to establish Buriram as Thailand's 'City of Sports'. And this investment started first in Buriram United, the local football team and pride of the entire region, as they have dominated the top spot of Thailand's Premier League for the past 4 years. Their stadium Thunder Castle (iMobile Stadium) is also the largest football stadium in all of Thailand, and they even ranked in the Top Ten Asian Clubs, which is not only extremely unlikely for a Thai team, but unimaginable for a city of roughly 200,000 people. The transformation then continued through investment in a Formula One racetrack, with plans for further circuits to come, and to date they have already hosted major international motorsport events, with potential for Formula One and Moto GP in the future. And I know this all seems very unlikely, but the same goes for much of what the city has achieved to date, and the venues have become remarkably popular with tourists from all over Thailand, with stadium tours, and the obligatory team jerseys at Thunder Castle Megastore, which have become almost like uniform in Buriram. So domestically the stadiums are by far the most popular tourist attraction in the province, and while I wouldn't recommend travelling to Buriram for the sole purpose of seeing them, they do make for a unique attraction in the city.





## Exploring Isaan

Otherwise we are in Isaan, which is a region relatively untouched in Thailand due to its expansive size, and absence of tourist infrastructure. However there is an airport in Buriram, with cheap daily flights from Bangkok, so it is now one of the easier accessible parts of the Isaan region. And this no doubt works to its advantage, at least for the more adventurous of travellers, who seek an escape from the more typical tourist trails of Thailand. In fact this post could quickly turn into a massive feature on Isaan, simply because I love talking about the region, so much so that I have literally written a [150,000 word book](#) on the local cultures of these far-flung rice fields, and the contrasting traditions found in these lesser known border regions. However the main draw to Buriram, and arguably the entire region of Isaan, is in no doubt Phnom Rung Historical Park and Mueang Tham ruins which are part of a 225 kilometer roadway built by the Angkor Empire (the Khmer Highway) leading from neighbouring Cambodia, and includes the famous [temple of Angkor Wat in Cambodia](#). And easily one of my most fascinating travel experiences to date was the enchantment of the annual [Phanom Rung festival](#) which takes place bi-annually at the ancient temple ruins.

Isaan Thailand: Seasons Events and Celebrations in Thai Countryside

