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There's More to a Thai Ghost Story Than Being Scary

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📅 12 Oct 2020 | ⌚ 9 min read | 👁 8,397 views

Morality tales or folklore, supernatural myth or natural phenomenon explained, horror or romance? Thai ghost stories bear many souls. Folklore, paranormal beliefs, and animism are ingrained in Thai culture and a regular feature of the entertainment world. Before buying a ticket to a Thai horror film, get up close and cosy with some of their ghostly stars.

Just like in other Southeast Asian countries, Thais love supernatural urban legends and ghost stories. This has less to do with superstition than the spirits themselves as, in Thailand, ghosts and mystic creatures are an exciting and sometimes practical part of Thai folklore, getting small children to behave and keeping adults entertained at (nocturnal) social gatherings through dramatic ghoulish tales. Want a social gathering to be stilted? Then, just ask someone to tell a ghost story.

As an agricultural country that relies heavily on nature and its unpredictability, farmers also depend on benevolent spirits to boost the productivity of their crops as well as favorable weather conditions. If the (related) spirits are pleased, the rain will be ample, plant diseases and bugs will leave the farms alone, and hopefully, no natural disasters will occur.

Rice growers make small offerings to the spirit of rice (Mae Posop or "Mother of Grains") when they anticipate high yields, and fishermen often give a small tribute to the water spirits to help them catch more fish and steer away from danger at sea. Anything done with disrespect to spirits, which the Thais call "phit phi" (upsetting the spirits), either in the rice fields or household often results in misfortune and inexplicable sickness in the community.



Phi Ta Khon Festival (Ghost Festival) 2025

The Phi Ta Khon Festival, more commonly known as the Ghost Festival of Thailand, is a colorful part in Thailand's rich tradition of ghost and spirit folklore and bears a passing resemblance to Mexico's Día de los Muertos or "Day of the Dead." While the exact dates of the festival are usually announced by local ... [Continue reading](#)

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Thais ask for favors from spirits, but oftentimes they also use supernatural causes to explain natural phenomena or ailments they can't grasp. When balls of methane naturally shoot up from the underground, Thais see them as balls of fires spat out by the Naga, the divine serpent deity that dwells in major rivers. Way back when modern medicine was not popular nor accessible, mental illness and unusual ailments that were hard to cure were often explained and justified by supernatural causes.

It's hardly surprising then that a lot of Thai films revolve around repeated ghosts and paranormal themes. Some are seriously scary and will make the hair on the back of your neck stand up. Here are some celebrity ghosts worth getting to know in Thai folklore.



Krasue is a woman possessed by a cursed spirit that turns her into a blood-sucking creature with a voracious appetite for all things gross. By day, she's an ordinary woman who might seem a little reserved and antisocial. At night, she goes out to feed with her internal organs hanging down from her neck. If you see a head with glowing guts floating around at night, it's probably a krasue heading out to dinner.

Krasue is generally harmless, but legend has it that her favorite food is the placenta surrounding a new born baby. That makes it difficult to fend off a krasue when a midwife is at work. It is also believed that after it feeds, krasue float around looking for clothes left outside to dry overnight. Families would find their laundry smudged with bile and other disgusting secretions from a krasue's mouth, and it is advised to dispose of the contaminated clothes immediately. The probable reason behind such superstitions is to remind people to keep their laundry indoors at night, as the clothes could get damp and cause skin irritations and even fungus, as humidity levels are usually high in Thailand.

There's no cure once you've been cursed and turned into a krasue. If the spirit is expelled, the person will also die. Krasue must find a new host, a new unlucky lady, to possess before dying or face an excruciating, intolerably painful death. It is believed that if you swallow a krasue's saliva, you're next in line. So, for your safety, keep your mouth closed when you're sleeping. This also believe that planting thorny plants like rattan or ones with sharp leaves like lemongrass can effectively fend off a krasue, as contact with this spiky greenery could injure its entrails.

KRASUE: INHUMAN KISS (Official Trailer) - In Cinemas 13 June 2019



Pop



A cult classic with an iconic pop character: "Ban Phi Pop" (House of Pop)

Similar to the krasue, a pop is a half-human constantly hungry for flesh, organs and blood. Some believe that pop is a possessed person and that the evil spirit can be safely expelled with strong magic. And if the host dies, the curse dies with it. Others believe that the pop is a former witch doctor who used dark magic in wrongful ways or to hurt other people. His bad karma then turns him (or her) into a flesh-eating creature.

Some even believe that the pop runs in a cursed family, and there's always one in every generation. There's no cure, and it's up to the family to contain its cursed member to save the clan from humiliation and public shaming.

Explained scientifically, pop is most likely the rationale for understanding a mentally challenged sick person, possibly with schizophrenia, severe bipolar disorder, or hallucinations. Unable to explain or treat the sick, villagers used to turn to the supernatural to justify it. Pop is a popular urban legend in northeastern Thailand (Esan) where people like to consume the meat of cows, buffaloes and freshwater fish raw, which often contain tapeworm and *Opisthorchis viverrini*, both worms that can be fatal. Spreading the story of pop deters villagers from eating raw meat, as they don't want others to think they're a pop.

So how do you know when someone is possessed with a pop spirit? There are several symptoms from becoming wildly aggressive, falling ill and being bedridden to being melodramatic and crying all the time. The common symptom, though, is uncontrollable hunger for fresh blood and organs. And they eat a lot. Know anyone like this?

A pop is not aggressive, and they don't usually go around disemboweling people for food. They more likely feed on pets, chickens and cows. But if you do encounter a hungry pop, run.



This kind of ghost is not cursed, just unfortunate. They are the spirits of people who have met a “sudden death” or death by unnatural causes; such as, an accident, drowning, being shot, murdered, burnt in a fire, and also suicide. Their dispositions vary from aggressive (because their last moment in life is marked by violence and terror) to vengeful (because they were murdered) and bitter (because they died before their time), so there’s no knowing what they’ll do when you encounter them.

Phi tai hong are mostly the spirits of those killed in road accidents and small, simple shrines are usually set up at locations where accidents often claim lives to appease the unhappy spirits. Travelers believe that these phi tai hong, who likely died instantly and unknowingly in gruesome accidents, are usually resentful at their destiny. They refuse to move on and like to hang out at the accident scene causing deadly mishaps to road travelers to inflict the same pain on them.

So, what do Thais do when they see a small, makeshift shrine on side of the road? They honk, mainly as an act of respect to the spirits. In a way, these shrines are a reminder that these are accident-prone spots that have claimed lives, and that drivers should be extra careful.

Phi tai thang klom



Phi tai thang klom is a subcategory of phi tai hong and is a woman who died during childbirth with the baby still inside her. Understandably perhaps, she is always in a bad mood.

Even though the baby had not been delivered when she passed away, a phi tai thang klom often makes an appearance with a baby in her arms and humming a chilling lullaby. These ghostly apparitions are usually not harmful, though they are known to make those who see them lose control of their bladders, or see their hair turn white overnight with fright.

One phi tai thang klom made it into the hall of ghostly fame and became an urban legend. Mae Nak from Phra Khanong district lived during the reign of King Rama IV the Great. She shared a simple life with her husband, Mak, a farmer until he was suddenly drafted, leaving her alone while heavily pregnant. She died in childbirth, but the devotion to her husband was so strong she manifested herself with human flesh and continued to live with him after he returned home as a war hero.

Having no clue about his wife's demise, Mak started to wonder why neighbors kept their distance or appeared terrified whenever the wife and son were mentioned in conversation. He finally realized his wife was dead and was saved by a revered monk who managed to appease Mae Nak's spirit.

Phi ban phi ruean

These are good ghosts. They are benevolent spirits that protect houses and the family from bad luck and any invasion of wandering evil spirits. Most houses and buildings and even vacant land have a phi ban phi ruean, and the level of spiritual service depends on how powerful they are and how the property owners treat them. A house shrine is set up to provide them with a comfortable home, food, drinks and entertainment. It's not compulsory to set up a shrine for them, but be warned that without one, they are prone to roaming around, leaving the house and its occupants unattended.

The idea behind phi ban phi ruean is probably to keep people in the house on their best behavior and avoid being disrespectful or committing immoral acts; such as, swearing, lying and stealing, as these acts would likely offend the benevolent spirit that protects the house.

Follow Pancake, a phi tai hong that later becomes a dorm's clumsy resident spirit in the film series, "Ho Tao Tak" (Oh My Ghost).



Manta Klangboonkrong

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