

Ghosts, Spirits and Spirit Houses

Although Thailand is pre-dominantly Buddhist, there are many beliefs and customs which owe nothing to [Buddhism, but instead have their roots in Hindu or animist beliefs](#). The presence of ghosts or spirits (*phi*) is a widely held belief and not something that most Thais take lightly; an unhappy spirit can cause major problems. There are all manner of spirits: good; bad; mischievous; spirits that can be trusted; spirits that can't be trusted; spirits that live in the rivers; spirits that live in the trees; spirits that live in the home; the rice spirit; the wind spirit and many more. Each spirit has its own role and cannot get involved in another spirit's domain. For instance, the rice spirit can be called upon to ask for a good harvest, but it can't protect your house.



Spirit Houses

With this in mind and not wishing to upset any spirits, the *phi* has to be kept happy and one of the most noticeable ways a foreign visitor will spot this is with the spirit house. These can be seen outside most hotels, guest-houses, private homes and business premises. Usually raised on a platform or column, they are typically made of wood and look like a **miniature temple or traditional Thai house**. The spirit house is for the use of the *phra phum* (spirit of the land) who was there before the humans moved in.

Just providing a spirit house by itself does not mean that the *phi* will be happy. The spirit house must be located in the best possible location. **Monks from the local wat may be consulted to ensure the most auspicious location is found.** The spirit house is also meant to reflect the human owner's building. So, for a 5-star hotel the spirit house will be quite grand compared to that found outside a farmer's house. If you look closely enough at a spirit house, you may see **small figurines inside and even miniature pieces of furniture**. It's not unheard of for model-sized cars to be placed at the disposal of the *phi*.



Clusters of spirit houses can sometimes be seen by the side of the road. This could be because it

marks an accident black spot or where somebody has died. Alternatively, it could be that they have been placed against a **sacred banyan tree**. Damaged or crumbling spirit houses cannot just be thrown away and replaced with a new one, so they are placed against the base of a sacred banyan tree. .

Daily Offerings

The **spirit house must be high enough to show respect**, but still low enough to make daily offerings. These come in the form of incense and flowers (usually a garland of jasmine) as well as food and drink. If you don't want to annoy the spirits, be careful not to knock over that plate of oranges or small bottle of Coke or Fanta which you may randomly see on a tray on the pavement or sidewalk.

Good Spirits

Spirits of the home (*phi ruan*) can be trusted to behave and therefore can reside in the family home unlike the spirit of the land which resides in the spirit house. There are regional variations as to how these spirits are looked after, but in many cases these trusted spirits are thought to be **deceased family members** and they are accorded a special place in the home. This is often on a shelf high up where fresh flowers and drinks will be provided.

Evil Spirits

Many of the ghosts that get up to no good are thought to be the spirits of **dead people who failed to be reborn**. Not all of these spirits are bad, but most of them are and they can be volatile and unpredictable. However, for every evil spirit there is an anti-spirit to counter it. Anybody having problems with a malevolent spirit may call on the services of a spirit doctor (*mor phi*), who can help find the anti-spirit.

Don't Upset the Spirits

Spirits are attracted to trouble, so Thai children are taught from an early age to [keep out of trouble and be jai yen](#). Attracting attention to yourself with loud and outlandish behaviour may attract the interest of some unwanted *phi* so its best to try and remain calm and collected and avoid trouble wherever possible. If you do attract a ghost there are various ways they can be tricked, but you may need the services of the *mor phi* (spirit doctor) to help you out.

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