

The Tiger Cave Temple is considered by Krabi's Buddhists to be one of the most sacred sites in the province. Even for those who are not religiously inclined there are some fascinating features here well worthy of a visit, which can include either a moderately strenuous or a very strenuous hike, depending on which of two staircases you choose. The view from the top, combined with the lovely Buddhist statuary, make the summit of the hill an unforgettably and serenely beautiful place.

Sunset ascents are becoming increasingly popular, especially at a full moon, when it is possible to see the sun setting the islands in the Andaman Sea on fire in the west, while a golden moon rises over the Krabi lowlands in the east. The cave temple is aptly named because of the rock outgrowth nearby, which resembles a tiger's claw.

Tiger Cave Temple is a center for meditation, its spectacular setting in the Ao Luk Thanu mountain ranges providing the tranquillity necessary for meditation. The main vihara or holy of holies is inside a small shallow limestone cave, of which both sides are lined by monastic cells, like caves, called kutis. The well-lit and well-maintained temple compound is currently home to some 250 monks and nuns. This little forest reserve was spared from logging by the monks ordaining the largest trees and thereby thwarting any attempts at cutting them down. So as well as the human monks and nuns there are also a number of monks going by the name of "Phra Ton" - "Tree Monk" in Thai ■

For a naturalist, the site is a microcosm of Krabi's former natural environment. "Wonderful Tree", not far from the main shrine and adorned in sacred cloth, may well have the largest root base of any tree remaining in Thailand. The whole area is full of caves and limestone rock formations. Archeologists have found remnants of ancient habitations as old as from the Stone Age. Stone tools, shards of pottery and beads and idols of clay have all been unearthed. All these bear testimony to the cultural heritage of the area ■

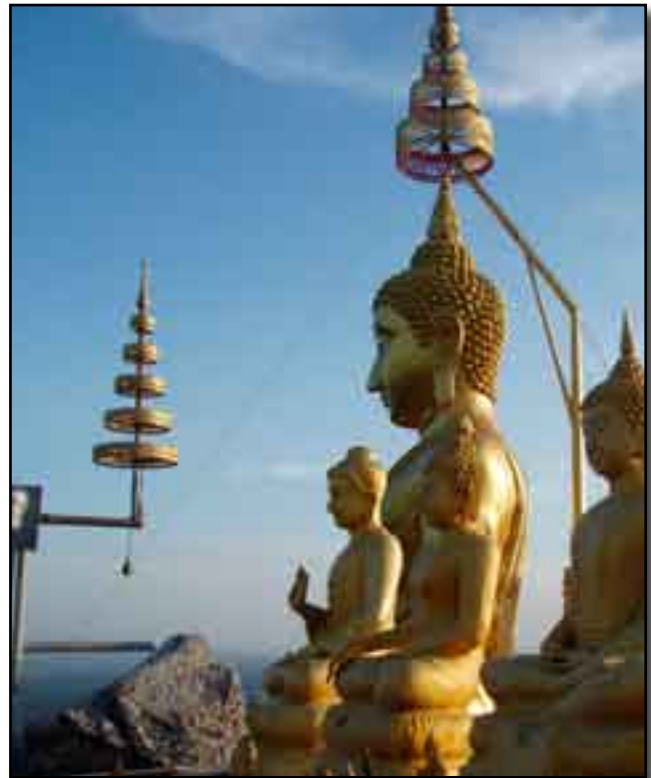


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