



AIPH

AIPH Exhibition Site Inspection Report Nakhon Ratchasima (Korat), Thailand

International Association of Horticultural Producers
Horticulture House
Chilton
Didcot
OX11 0RN
United Kingdom
www.aiph.org

Date of Inspection: 11th-14th September
2023

AIPH Inspectors:

Mr Leonardo Capitanio, President
Mr Kevin Chung, Chair, Exhibitions
Committee
Mr Takuhiro Yamada, Vice Chair of
Exhibitions Committee
Ms Karen Tambayong, AIPH Board
member, representative of region VIII:
Southeast Asia and Oceania
Mr Tim Briercliffe, Secretary General
Ms Elena Terekhova, International
Relations Manager

Contents

Section		Page
1	Introduction	3
2	Site visit and presentations	4
3	Points raised by AIPH	8
4	Conclusion	11

1. Introduction

The city of Nakhon Ratchasima (Korat) has applied to AIPH to be granted approval to host an A1 World Horticultural Exhibition in 2029.

On 11th-14th September 2023 an AIPH inspection team visited Nakhon Ratchasima province to inspect the selected site and review plans within the application.

The AIPH team were kindly hosted by Mr. Sayam Sirimonkol, Governor of Nakhon Ratchasima, the city administration, Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau (TCEB) officials, the Department of Agriculture as well as associations, experts, local businesses and citizens.

The inspection also included a courtesy visit to the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, where the AIPH delegation had a meeting with Mr. Prayoon Inskul, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives and Mr. Rapibhat Chandarasrivongs, Director General of the Department of Agriculture. The AIPH team visited the proposed Expo site as well as sites of horticultural and tourist interest in the province.

The inspection team was joined by representatives of the AIPH Member, The Royal Thai Government, Department of Agriculture whose support and cooperation are of great importance to the organization of the Horticultural Exhibition.



2. Site visit and presentations

Nakhon Ratchasima is the capital of Nakhon Ratchasima province and the second largest city in Thailand. It is one of the four major cities of Isan (Northeast Thailand), known as the "big four of Isan". It is a UNESCO triple heritage city, a hub of agriculture, host to Korat Special Economic Zone and a priority area for tourism development in Thailand.

The total population of Nakhon Ratchasima is 2,630,058 and 9.9 million people visited in 2022. Tourism numbers are expected to increase in the coming years, as there has been an increase of 8.7% in the period between 2014 and 2022. 98% of visitors are Thai nationals and 2% foreigners. A minimum of 2.6 mln visitors and a maximum of 4 mln visitors are expected at the proposed Expo. Room capacity estimates allow to conclude that the city has enough accommodation infrastructure for an increase in tourism during the Expo.

Nakhon Ratchasima Railway Station on Mukkhamontri Road acts as the main railway transportation hub in the region. A high-speed train connecting Korat with Bangkok in around 1.5 hours is planned to be operational in 2027.

Passing near the city is Mittraphap Road, the main arterial road that joins Bangkok with the province capitals of Saraburi, Nakhon Ratchasima and stretching up to Lao PDR.

The Khong district in Korat was selected to host the proposed Expo. Covering 108.48 ha of land, the Korat Expo 2029 site is located on the outbound State Highway No. 2 (Mittraphap Road), the main route that leads to all major cities in the Northeast of Thailand.

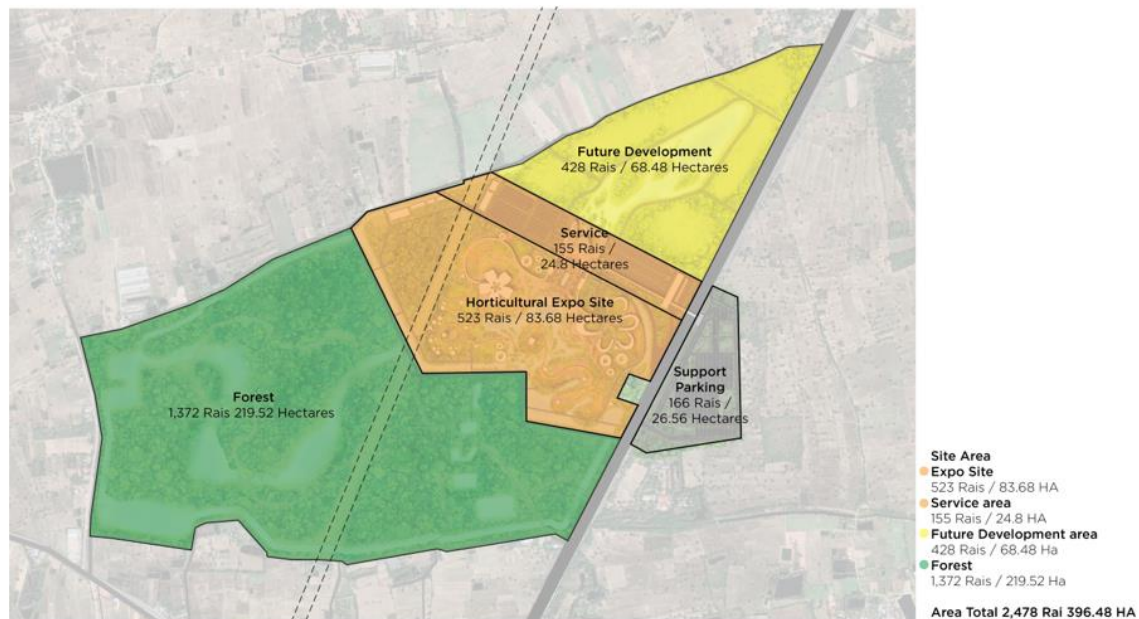
The proposed site for the Expo is approximately 20 km and 40 minutes' drive from the city center (Mueang District) and the distances from important points are as shown below.



The Department of Lands of the Royal Thai Government has issued permission to Nakhon Ratchasima Province to use the public land in the plot intended for the Expo site as the venue for a World Horticultural Exhibition. This land usage has been comprehensively planned to implement Korat's vision of sustainability and innovation during the Expo and beyond.

All the land belongs to the state and currently consists of 55% agricultural land, 38% forest and 7% water. The land is mostly flat; soil and water quality assessments have been conducted and results deemed acceptable for hosting an Expo, although there is some concern about salt levels.

The post-Expo site planning takes into account local development directions as well as a desire for nature conservation. The proposed land development concept for the Expo site is intended to serve as a blueprint of a sustainable city development; striking the balance between nature conservation, agriculture and preservation of water resources.

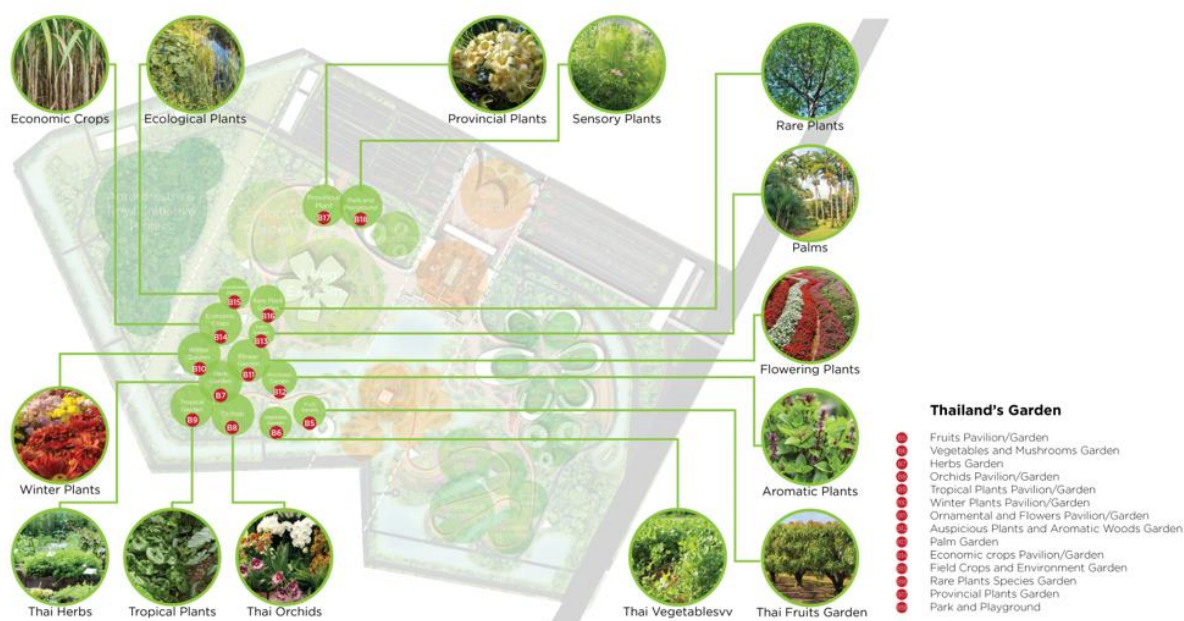


The Expo Masterplan is already well developed for the early stage of the project, featuring main highlights, Expo zoning, entrances and exits, service areas, transportation, architectural highlights, hardscape and softscape calculations, circulation inside the Expo site as well as all the necessary infrastructure for good Expo functioning and operations, including water supply, water systems, excavation plan, drainage system, waste water natural treatment, waste management, energy supply, solar energy, firefighting system and evacuation routes.



The main entrance can be navigated from three main routes: from the Korat city centre or downtown, from the Korat-Bangkok Expressway, and from Bua Yai Station (Light Rail Transit and high-speed rail) and neighbouring provinces. Regular shuttle services will be made available for Expo visitors travelling on routes via the Korat city centre/downtown and via the Bua Yai station and other neighbouring provinces. A parking area with 10,000 spaces, public bus routes and parking, dedicated service lanes, VIP routes and international Participant entrances are planned.

Thematic gardens and a variety of horticultural attractions were presented to the AIPH inspection team. Planting plans and international competition plans were outlined. A plant planning assessment report was prepared based on soil and water quality and climate data. Plant plans integrate the unique geographic and natural features of the local ecosystem. Planting timescales have been laid out.



The target for international participation is 30 countries. The international garden area is situated in the southwest corner of the site, adjacent to the main road. This prime location ensures that the international garden area will be the first thing visitors see upon arrival, located on their left-hand side once they pass through the event entrance. Bonded warehouse and quarantine stations are planned in the Expo area to facilitate plant and exhibition material importation for participants. An assistance package will be considered to support developing countries.

A thorough analysis of likely visitor numbers was conducted to estimate overall Expo visitor numbers, peak day and average day numbers.

Visitor journeys were considered to make visitor experiences smooth and enjoyable.

Varied event, cultural and B2B programs and hospitality routes were outlined.

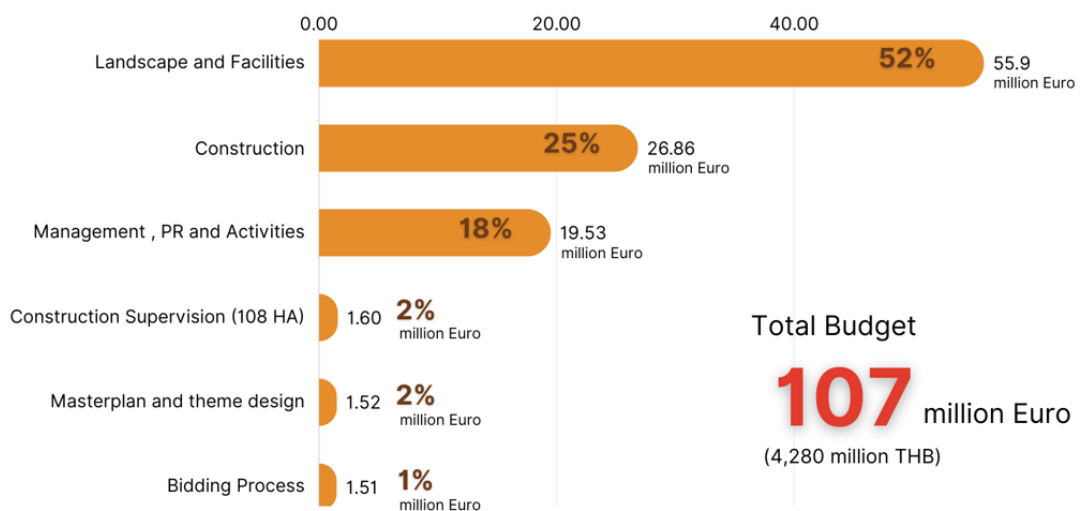
The total Expo budget approved by the Cabinet is € 107 mln. Private contributions are expected. Budget allocation plan was presented.



Estimation of the Expo Visitation (Based Case)



Budget Allocation



Economic impacts, visitor spend, ticket sales, sponsorships, venue rental were estimated.



3. Points raised by AIPH

Following the visit and presentations the following points were raised:

- The site inspection team was impressed with the excellent collaboration of a number of organisations leading on this project together, such as TCEB, Ministry of Agriculture & Cooperatives, Ministry of Transport, Tourism bodies, Chambers of Commerce, provincial administration. The support of the Governor of Korat is instrumental to making things happen. The support of the private sector that comes so early on in the project will allow it to develop in the most economically viable way.
- Citizens are very enthusiastic about the project and there seem to be no issues relating to land ownership or any predicted negative consequences for the communities living close to the intended Expo site.
- The Masterplan is very advanced for this early stage of the project. You have put a lot of effort, thinking and means into its creation, and you have thought of many aspects, including the possible challenges that Expo Organisers sometimes encounter much later. Your masterplan may change slightly as the thinking develops, but this is a great starting point and we would like to congratulate you on this achievement. To further engage the best talents of Thailand, you could consider launching a nationwide competition for landscape and architecture projects that will make your Expo design unique and captivate the attention of the world.
- The theme for the Expo and the proposed sub-themes are well developed, reflect the development directions of the region and also align with the current world challenges and AIPH Green City agenda.

- The promotional ideas, events and programs, as well as targets for visitors and tourism that you have fixed, are well thought of and align with regional and national aspirations.
- Your international participation target is of 30 countries which we agree is realistic.. It is best to have good quality participation (rather than more exhibits of poorer quality), and you should expect to accompany those international participants, both financially and in helping them manage their plans, designs and implementation. International participants may be informed by diplomatic channels but in reality, you will need to do much more work to convince them to come and invest into their participation. You have allocated budgets to support LDCs but you may also consider a support budget for developed countries' participation, keeping in mind that you are investing into the quality of visitor experience at your Expo.
- During the visit and presentations, we slightly missed the involvement of the horticulture industry itself, as well as clear objectives for the development of the ornamental horticulture sector in the region as the result of the Expo or one of its immaterial legacies. We were informed that there are horticulture associations in the region but they were not prominent in the meetings. Based on our research, one of the experts who can facilitate your introductions to ornamental plants associations in Thailand is Mr. Sappasiri Chaovanich (active in aroids). You have also mentioned Orchids association; please make sure you have contact with all major players.
- You reassured the inspection team that you would bring specific ornamental horticulture showcases from around the country, and we know in Thailand you can do that very well. You may also consider working specifically with the sector, ensuring government support, to develop its reach, research & innovation and market share in Thailand. Please demonstrate to AIPH in your next presentation how the local horticultural industry will be involved in the Expo. AIPH members will appreciate concrete and specific proposals detailing the way you plan to involve the industry not only in terms of representation, but also to ensure horticultural content in the Expo, around the Expo, across your hospitality and marketing programs.
- The budget you have allocated for the Expo project will need to increase. You have mentioned mobilisation of provincial budgets as well, and more concrete data will be of interest. If you can demonstrate to AIPH members that the budget can be increased then this will help your bid.
- You will need to think of the most efficient ways to connect the Expo site with major transport nodes, because for the visitors every extra mile or transport change is another reason not to go to the Expo at all. A train station in front of the Expo site is a good idea. AIPH encourages the use of public transport and connecting all transport means in one system for a smooth visitor experience. It needs to be confirmed that the high speed rail from Bangkok to Korat will be operational ahead of the opening of the Expo. Unfortunately, many Expo projects in the past were less successful than they could have been because of delays in infrastructure construction.
- The selected site itself has lots of trees and an established ecosystem. You need to investigate the ecological impact of the Expo, conduct a careful assessment of trees that are supposed to stay or be transplanted to different areas. You need to plan the Expo in between mature trees and not the other way around. Transplanting trees needs to be done in a very professional way to ensure high survival rates. You must endeavour to work as much as possible within the existing environment and this will also give you additional sustainability credentials.
- You have conducted assessments of soil quality and salinity. Based on these you have proposed no-risk range of plant species that will tolerate those conditions. Our

recommendation is to not restrict yourselves too much on plant species, and use a wider range of plants than what was proposed. Engage local industry to achieve as much variety as possible, showcase a broad range of plants, not just salt-tolerant plants. The water on the site is present, and some excavation and moving works are foreseen. These need to be carefully planned to enable planting to be established, as well as have enough time to correct any soil issues that you may encounter.

- Further development outside the Expo site is recommended, both for Expo operation and for the legacy transition. There must be hotels immediately besides the Expo, as well as the Expo village – a residential complex to host international and national participants, Expo staff, contractors' staff. Diverse range of accommodation with immediate access is necessary for visiting delegations, Expo guests, media and tourists. After the Expo is over, those should be repurposed to residential areas with convenient access to the Expo park and all surrounding infrastructure connecting the new area to other activity nodes in Korat. Generally, after the Expo those residential areas are attractive and the land value increases. You have mentioned a possibility to create a wellness center or eco-tourism installations in the area. Those are also a possibility but there should be clear plans for public-private partnerships about the maintenance of the land in the legacy transition phase, to avoid any possibility of abandoned buildings.
- We were pleased to see plans for private sponsorship. If the government could provide special conditions to those contributing (e.g. tax relief measures), it would be even better.
- The duration of 110 days is shorter than other Expos. However, given the weather conditions before the opening, it may be a very practical measure, especially if you manage to maintain good visitation throughout the opening period. Better quality and shorter duration are a valid proposition.

Conclusion

The AIPH inspection team were impressed with the way in which the application was presented, including submission of a detailed feasibility study, excellent presentations, well-organised site visit and all the enthusiasm, support and communication experienced with the province Governor, city representatives, Chamber of Commerce, associations and citizens. The inspection team believe there is great potential for this application to be successful with a good site and strong support from the province and the Royal Thai Government.

The AIPH inspection team would like to express our sincere thanks for all your hospitality to us during our visit to Korat.

Please continue to liaise closely with the AIPH member representative in Thailand and the AIPH Secretariat.

We advise you to take our comments on board and prepare your presentation for the next AIPH Expo Conference in Doha, Qatar, on 4th March 2024 after which the voting of our members for your candidature will take place. Please be prepared to give a presentation to the AIPH Expo Conference in support of your application.

Yours sincerely,



Tim Briercliffe

Secretary General