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Songkran (Thai name : เทศกาลสงกรานต์), the Thai New Year, is the most important festival in Thailand. With celebrations lasting up to a week, Thai New Year marks the end of the dry season with religious ceremonies and water fights, which are a trademark of the festival.



What is Songkran Festival?

The word Songkran means 'to move' or 'movement' in Thai. Songkran Festival is decided according to the movement of the sun from one zodiac position (Pisces) to a new one (Aries). Songkran is also known as the Water Splashing Festival, which is celebrated to mark the New Year in Thailand.

When is Songkran Festival 2023?

Songkran Festival is celebrated from April 13th to April 15th every year. There is an official opening ceremony on 13th April to mark the start of the Songkran Festival in big cities of Thailand. In many places of Thailand, the holiday extends to 5–10 days or more.

The Three Days of Songkran

April 13th: The first day of the new year is known as Song Nam Phra ('Pouring Water on Monks') Day. There are processions of Buddha images all across the country. This is the day when the biggest water fights happen.

April 14th: This day is also known as Wan Nao and it celebrates the old Thai New Year's Eve. This is also National Family Day when everyone is encouraged to spend time with their families.

April 15th: On this day, the New Year begins. This day is also known as Wan Payawan ('Bathing Buddha') Day. There are parties and celebrations everywhere, with ongoing water fights, concerts, street food, and much more!



How to Celebrate Songkran Festival

There are many traditional activities held during Songkran Festival, including the famous water splashing, cleaning houses and Buddha statues, merit-making in temples, as well as exciting street and beach Songkran parties.

1. Water Splashing

Water fights are an important part of the New Year celebrations. April is the hottest time of year in Thailand and splashing each other with water is an excellent way to cool down. Streets are closed to traffic and used as arenas: huge crowds of people gather to "fight" with water using pipes, buckets, and water guns. It's an activity that the younger generations love: foreigners are more than welcome to join in!

2. Cleaning

Like at Chinese New Year, Thai people clean their houses, schools, temples, offices, and other public places to welcome in the New Year with a fresh and clean environment. Merit-making: Most Thai people like to give gifts of food to monks in the temples and worship their ancestors during the Songkran Festival. The monks give them words of wisdom after receiving the food gifts.

3. Merit Making

Merit making is an important part of Songkran Festival. Thai people go to temples and offer food and clothing to the monks and listen to their Buddhist preaching. Offerings to the monks include preserved food, fruits, cooked dishes, and new robes for the monks.

4. Releasing Birds and Fish

Releasing birds and fish back to their natural habitats: Thai people see this practice of giving freedom to living things as part of their Buddhist belief that releasing animals to freedom returns back good fortune.



5. Folk Performances and Games

Folk performances and games are done for enjoyment during Songkran. There are Thai beauty competitions displaying traditional Thai dress and street parades. Other interesting activities during Songkran Festival include street food vendors, flag ceremonies, Thai dances, and boat races.

6. Building Sand Pagodas

Building sand towers on temple grounds involves Thai people bringing some sand to temples during the Songkran Festival. The sand can be used to build sand pagodas or repair temples. Helping with temple maintenance and helping monks in general is regarded as good practice during Songkran Festival.

Songkran History and Origin

Songkran originated from the ancient Indian Festival of Makar, which recognizes the sun's path. Thai people have taken it as the change of the old year into a new one. For Buddhists, this lucky movement of the heavenly bodies marks an important day.

In the past, Thai New Year was celebrated on the first day of the first month of the lunar calendar. Today, it is observed in the fifth month. The reasons for this change relate to a leaving behind of the former customs of the Thai people in the south of China, whose culture was one of rice farming and Buddhism.

Travel Tips for Celebrating Songkran in Thailand

Water fights are an extremely fun way to celebrate the Songkran Festival. If you want to join them, follow these tips to avoid any problems.

- 1. Follow the rules: it's a "war", but there are rules. Use clean fresh water and water guns (high-pressure guns are not allowed), and don't shoot people in the eyes.
- 2. Be careful: April is the hottest month of the year in Thailand, with temperatures that can reach up to 40 degrees Celcius (104 degrees Fahrenheit).
- 3. Wet powder: a lot of people will spread wet powder on your face to bless you (except on Khao San Road in Bangkok, where it is prohibited). Carry a bottle of water to wash your face afterwards.
- 4. Dress code: it's better to use swim goggles and swimsuits. Always wear a t-shirt (fighting topless is illegal).

- 5. Protect your electronic devices using a waterproof bag.
- 6. Avoid driving: traffic in Thailand is extremely heavy. During Songkran, thousands of people will be driving on the streets, making the roads particularly dangerous.
- 7. Don't splash water on monks, the elderly, babies, pregnant women, and people who are working. Try to respect people who wouldn't expect to participate in the water fight.
- 8. Don't take off your dress or shirt even you have got wet. You can get arrested, as it breaks the values and culture of Thailand.