

FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

Vietnamese culture has a long tradition of colourful festivals and events, with the aim of as simple as entertaining the community or as meaningful as expressing respect to country's builders, heroes, God and saints and as well as commemorating remarkable events. The festivals and events listed below may take place on a nation scale or belong to specific regions. There are two main types of activities conducted in Vietnam's festivals: ceremonial rites and entertaining activities.

VIETNAMESE LUNAR NEW YEAR



Vietnamese New Year has a history that dates back thousands of years, the Tet festival was originally a celebration held by Vietnamese farmers to thank the gods for the arrival of spring, sometime between late January or early February. Tet is a time of traditional ceremonies, special foods, enjoyable social activities and for family reunions as well as for paying respects to ancestors and the elders (which lasts for 3 to 7 days).

Preparation

For about one or even two weeks before, Vietnamese people has prepared for the New Year because they think that by the time a new year comes, everything must be new to welcome luck and get rid of bad thing. They spend time to clean their house, particularly ancestral altar, and decorate the house with new things which are usually in red (the color symbolizing the luck). Housewives are always busy with preparing food for “Tet” holiday and buying accessories for traditional rites. All members of family also get new clothes and of course, kids are always excited most by their new clothes. Particularly, all debts must be paid back because paying debt in the New Year will bring bad fortune in all around the year.

On 23rd of the last lunar month in the year, the householder will practice a farewell ceremony for the Kitchen Gods (called “Ong Tao” in Vietnamese). A carp will be used as a sacrifice which will pick up “Ong Tao” to Heaven Palace. On that day, “Ong Tao” will present his report of family’s businesses in previous year to the Jade Emperor. As the absence of “Ong Tao” in the house, Vietnamese usually plant “cay neu” (Lunar New Year pole) in front of their houses to prevent devils from harassing.

Besides, all members in family will visits and clean their ancestor’s graves together. They also incense and invite ancestor to come back home and enjoy Tet holiday with family. By doing this, Vietnamese people express respect to their ancestor and tighten links between family’s members.

Before New Year's Eve, a five-fruit tray will be put on ancestral altar, offered to the gods and ancestor as well as express wishes of the whole family about a new year with luck, health and prosperity. Moreover, a branch of flowering peach tree (or apricot flowers instead) and a couple of "chung" cakes are also indispensable.

New Year's Eve

By the time a new year comes, a lavish tray (including chicken, sticky rice, salt, rice, etc.) is set up in front of the house. The householder will practice traditional rite of giving thanks to the genies and ancestor as well as praying for a prosperous, lucky and healthy year. In New Year's Eve, firework is also fired in Vietnam to welcome New Year and people gather to admire firework display together.

Then, people will visit pagodas or temples with their family. In Vietnamese people's point of view, the very first moment of a new year is a solemn and holy moment that every wish will come true. Thus, they spend time giving the others best wishes as well as wishing for their own dream. On the way coming back home, each people will pick a bud of a tree and bring it home ("hai loc"). Vietnamese thinks that it's the symbol of fortune and when you bring it home, it means you bring fortune to your family.

One of the most important customs in New Year's Eve is "xong dat" (bursting into the land). the first ones who come to visit households—called first-foot—are very important and hence need to be well chosen, as they are believed to hold in their hands the entire luck of the family in New Year (Tan Nien). A chosen person will come to the house and give best wishes to the householder as well as his family. That chosen one takes crucial role in bringing fortune to family in New Year.

New Year's Days

There is a saying in Vietnam, "Father's Tet is on the First Day of New Year, Mother's Tet is on the Second, and Teacher's is on the Third". On the first and second New Year's Days, Vietnamese people usually gather with family or visit relatives and friends. The first day and the second day of New Year are the days of family. All members of family will gather and dine together. Wishes is given to everyone by the others; the old and kids will receive red envelopes which are filled with lucky money as a wish for health in a new year. On the third day, Vietnamese people will visit their teachers with some gifts to express their gratitude and wishes to their teachers. The remaining days of Tet holiday in Vietnam is for relatives and friends. This is also good occasion for New Year party or excursions.

Significantly, Vietnamese has many taboos on New Year's Days in order to keep luck in the house as well as avoid bad things. Typically, Vietnamese people don't clean the house during first three day of New Year; avoid of being angry, arguing, breaking dishes, etc.

HUONG PAGODA FESTIVAL



Together with Bai Dinh and Yen Tu Pagoda Festival, Huong Pagoda Festival is among the greatest Buddhist festival in northern part of Vietnam and plays an important role in the spiritual life of Vietnamese people in general and Vietnamese Buddhists in particular. Huong Pagoda is located in My Duc District, 70 kilometers away from Hanoi to the south. This Festival is held annually and lasts three months, from the 6th day of Lunar New Year to the 6th day of the third lunar month in the year.

As other festivals in Vietnam, Huong Pagoda Festival is also divided into two parts: The ceremonies and the entertaining activities. Ceremonial rituals consist of incense offering procession and Zen ceremony in which Monks and Buddhists offer incense, flowers, candles and fruits. On the other hand, entertaining activities include enjoying boat cruise along Yen Stream for watching picturesque scenery, climbing mountain and exploring holy caves. It is believed that climbing up the top of Huong Tich Mountain will bring you fulfillment and great success in life.

Coming to Huong Pagoda Festival, tourists have chance to taste three famous delicacies which are bamboo shoot, Sang vegetables and grinding roots. Coming at the beginning of Huong Pagoda Festival, tourists will be overwhelmed by the white color of apricot flowers covering the entire area of Huong Son mountain; and at the end of festival, you will have chance to taste the irresistibly fresh flavor of apricot juice.

LIM FESTIVAL



About twenty kilometers away from Hanoi, Lim Village of Bac Ninh province is the "hometown" of Quan Ho folk songs, one of Vietnam's intangible cultural heritages. In order to enhance and promote the tradition of Quan Ho singing as well as to shows the cultural art and beliefs of local people, Lim Festival – the festival of the pagodas in Lim Village and two banks of the Tieu Tuong river – is eagerly celebrated among local residents as well as pilgrims from every part of the country around the 12th or the 13th day of the first Lunar month.

Each year, thousands of tourists come to visit Lim Festival and enjoy that Intangible Cultural Heritage. On Lim Hill, several stages of villages in Bac Ninh Province are built. Visitors can enjoy “quan ho” singing at difference stages and interact with singers in traditional costumes. Female singers (called “lien chi” in Vietnamese) are beautiful in “ao tu than” (four-panel traditional dress) and “non quai thao” (“quai thao” hat, so-called “non ba tam”). Male singers (called “lien anh” in Vietnamese) are elegant in “ao the” and “khan xep”. They sing love duets together in pair of one male and one female – in which the singers must have not only quick reaction but also deep understanding on traditional tunes as well as their cultural and historical background.

Besides, Lim Festival is also space for various folk games such as “danh du” (bamboo swings), wrestling, cocks fighting, tugging war, blindman'sbuff, human chess, pot beating, etc. Especially, visitors can know more about culture of Vietnamese people in Red River Delta region with the competition of weaving.

Moreover, on the lake in front of Lim Communal House, visitors can catch the scenery of “quan ho” singing performance on a dragon boat. Coming to Lim Festival, visitors will experience a unique specialty of legend land of Kinh Bac as well as of Vietnam in general. Over 300 years in existence, Lim Festival has become an indispensable part of Vietnamese culture and pride of Vietnamese people.

CAU NGU FESTIVAL



The traditional festival Cau Ngu is unique and imbued with the cultural identity of coastal community. From long ago, the fishermen of coastal areas have considered whales as a rare kind of mammal that do not harm anyone and instead lend a helping hand when people unfortunately meet storms on their voyages. In other words, whales are taken into account as a sacred creature as well as the savior for fishermen. Each village has its own way of organizing Cau Ngu festival in Vietnam. However, Cau Ngu festival in Vietnam includes the traditional games and is taken place in 2 days in the middle of the March (Lunar Calendar).

The festival starts with solemn ritual ceremonies, in which elders hold a palanquin procession from villages to villages, displaying fishermen’s union and expressing gratitude towards their ancestors and guardians. According to fishermen’s belief, if they put much thought into the rituals, celebrate them with huge reverence, they will be guaranteed a life with safe and sound sea journeys, great fishing results, and full of wealth and comfort.

Apart from the worshipping ceremony, Cau Ngu is about vibrant traditional games which well presents culture in the central coast of Vietnam, including fish-catching, net-casting, swimming competition, football matches, and etc. Music is also an indispensable part of the festival, with “Boi” singing is performed.

HOLIDAY OF THE DEAD (THANH MINH)



Entering the warm spring when flowers start blooming and every creature seems to shake off its gloomy appearance in the previous winter, Vietnamese people celebrate the traditional festival of Thanh Minh-Holiday of the Dead on third day of the third month according to the lunar calendar. It aims at showing people’s respects towards their ancestors and their deceased relatives as well with activities such as cleaning graves, praying, offerings, eating cold foods.

The graves are normally cleaned and tidied a few days prior. Before the Holiday, family members clean and tidy the graves of their ancestors and also the surrounding areas. On the date of Thanh Minh, individuals make solemn visits to the graves with offerings of incense, food and flowers.

At home, they eat Banh Troi (spheres made of glutinous rice flour, each with a piece of red sugar inside) and Banh Chay (spheres that are bigger than Banh Troi but contain sweet green bean paste instead of red sugar pieces) as cold foods. The festival is also known as Cold Food Festival (Tet Han Thuc) as people often eat cold dishes on this day.

DEATH ANNIVERSARY OF THE HUNG KINGS



As Vietnamese people always show deep gratitude towards their origins and ancestors, every year, the Death anniversary of the Hung Kings-also known as Hung King Temple Festival is celebrated on the tenth day of the third Lunar month.

Being one of the public holidays of Vietnam, this festival is for worshipping Hung Kings– the country’s founders, those who make great contribution in building the country in its very first start.

Death anniversary of the Hung Kings has the purpose of educating the young generation of Vietnam society about their traditional root. On this special day, Vietnamese people, not only at home but also abroad, turn their souls and hearts towards Nghia Linh Mountain, Viet Tri City, Phu Tho Province—the sacred land where Hung Kings established the country centuries ago.

Every year is the same—people from all corners of the country and even oversea gather at Hung King Temple, Phu Tho to participate in solemn ceremonies with many ritual activities. Apart from the part of ceremonies, Death anniversary of the Hung Kings also consist of several cheerful activities like performances of Cheo singing, Quan Ho singing, Xoan singing as well as games of chess playing, rice cooking and chicken kicking.

Overall, Death anniversary of the Hung Kings is a valuable opportunity for Vietnamese at home and abroad to strengthen the country's long lasting tradition of gratitude, patriotism as well as enhance national solidarity.

MID-AUTUMN OR CHILDREN'S MOON FESTIVAL (TET-TRUNG-THU)



Mid-Autumn Festival is held on 15th day of the eighth lunar month to celebrate biggest full- moon in the year. In Vietnam, this festival is for children specially and children are center of all activities on that day.

In the occasion of Mid-autumn Festival, moon cakes are usually used as gifts of people to the others, especially their parents and grandparents. Vietnamese also put moon cakes and variety of fruits on ancestral altar to offer their ancestor. At night, all members of family will gather around a lavish tray of fruits and of course, moon cakes, and savor it together while admiring the full moon. The adults will told kids the story about Ms. Hang Nga – beautiful daughter of the Jade Empire and Mr. Cuoi. Kids enjoy art performance all the night (including singing, plays, lion dances, drum performance, etc.) and then walk in a procession with colorful lanterns held in their hands. The procession will go through all streets in the area and light up the night.

Mid-autumn Festival emerged very early in Vietnam and has many distinct features. However, Mid-autumn in Vietnam also share similar features with other countries in the regions such as moon cakes, lion dances, lanterns, etc. On that occasion, everyone longs to hear the sound of drums and take part in procession. It's a memorable experience in childhood of every Vietnamese child.