

## FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

*Thailand never fails to amaze its countless visitors with the most colorful festivities and events sure to delight you with glimpses into the country's heritage and traditions. There are countless festivals and special events held in Thailand throughout the year. Some of these are celebrated nationwide while other festivals are specific to particular cities or provinces. With a number of Thai festivals and Buddhist holidays, the exact date varies each year because it depends on the lunar calendar and the night of the full moon. Listed below are some of the best-known annual Thai festivals and events.*

### SONGKRAN (APRIL)



As the most important date in the Thai calendar, the traditional Thai New Year or Songkran is celebrated nationwide for three days in April through various exciting events. Songkran is a time when the Thai family will try to be together, and many people will travel back to their home village. Songkran festival is a chance to immerse oneself in traditional Thai culture. Buddhists visit the temple for the ceremony of 'Rod Nam Dam Nua'. They sprinkle water on the Buddha images, and on the hands of the monks and novices at the temple, as a symbolically traditional ritual of washing sins away and blessing other people. This holiday has now become a day for general pleasure, with merrymakers taking to the streets to throw water at one another. Young people have a fun time lying in ambush with buckets of water, huge water guns and hoses to get everyone soaking wet.

### LOI KRATHONG (NOVEMBER)



Held at full moon of the 12th lunar month (in the Western calendar this usually falls in the month of November), Loi Krathong is an ancient festival to honor and thank the water spirits for all the water provided during the growing season. It is the most romantic festival of Thailand. In the evening, people gather at the waterside to float krathongs, lotus-shaped vessels made of natural materials, containing a candle, incense sticks, a coin or two and beautifully decorated with flowers into the sea, as a thanksgiving and worship to the Goddess of Water. Magnificent celebrations are held in Sukhothai and Chiang Mai.

### MAKHA BUCHA DAY (FEBRUARY OR MARCH)



Held on the full-moon day of the third Thai lunar month, Makha Bucha Day is one of the holiest Buddhist holy days and commemorates the occasion when 1,250 of Buddha's disciples gathered to hear his preach. Buddha ordained these monks and spread the principles of Buddhism. This marked a key event in the development of the religion. 45 years later, on the same full moon in the third lunar month, Buddha again delivered his teachings shortly before his death. Nowadays, Maka Bucha becomes a national Holiday in Thailand and is widely celebrated throughout the country. On this day, in the morning many Thai people wake up early to give alms to monks and in the evening, temples are full of people listening to sermons and making merit. They often perform a ritual known as the the candle ceremony where they walk clockwise three times around the temple, holding flowers, incense and a lighted candle. In Thailand, the sale of alcohol is banned on religious holidays. This means bars and clubs are closed for the entire holiday.

### ROCKET FESTIVAL (MAY OR JUNE)



Rocket Festival is a unique festival throughout Isan (North East Thailand) prior to the start of the rainy season, May-June, with the exact dates specific to each village. Traditionally this ancient festival lasts for 2-3 days. The festival's origin lies in the custom of firing bamboorockets into the sky at the start of the rice-growing season as an annual plea to gods for plenty of rainfall in the rainy season. The festival now takes the form of a competition to see whose rocket will stay aloft for the longest time. It is held annually over the weekend that falls in the middle of May. Villagers packed charcoal and gunpowder into long plastic tubing tied to a bamboo pole. The beautifully decorated rockets are mounted on vehicles and traditional carts and paraded through the village/town. Music, song, dancing, drinking and revelry are integral elements of the procession. On Sunday, the rockets are launched from a tall ladder-like structure. A single rocket will be launched and predictions are made with regard to the next season's rains and harvest. Then, the rocket competition begins. If a rocket fails to launch or explodes then the owner will be thrown unceremoniously into the mud.