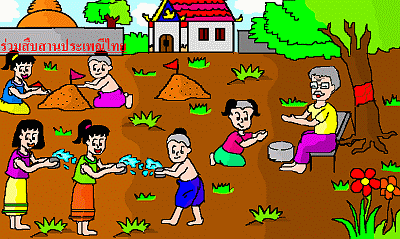
**SONGKRAN FESTIVAL IN THAILAND**

**Origins of Songkran**

Friday, 23 February 2007 01:35 National Culture Commission

There was once a young man who was prodigious in learning. He understood even the language of the birds. This excited the jealousy of Kabil Maha Phrom, one of the gods of a higher heavenly realm. He came down to meet the young man and posed him three sphinx-like riddles with the wager that if the young man failed to give the right answers within seven days, he would lose his head but if he succeeded, the god himself would give his own. Like all folk tales the young man was at first at his wit's end to answer such difficult riddles and he repaired to a certain place in order to kill himself rather than face defeat.

He stopped at the foot of a tall tree at the top of which was an aerie. By chance he heard the mother eagle comforting her eaglets who cried for more food, that they would be gratified soon by feasting on the body of the young man who would fail to solve the riddles. She then related the story of the wager between the god and the young man, and in answer to her children's question the mother eagle satisfied them with the right answers to those three riddles. The young man availed himself of this information and on the appointed day he gave the god the three right answers.

The god, as was the case in such tales, lost the wager and himself cut off his own head. His head was a terrible one for if it touched the earth there would be a universal conflagration and if it fell into the sea, the sea would dry up through its intense heat. The god's head therefore was deposited in a certain cave in the heavens. Every new year that is on Songkran Day one of the god's seven daughters in turn will carry her father's head in procession with millions of other gods and goddesses circumambulating like the sun round the Meru, the Buddhist Olympian Mount. After that there are feasts among the celestial beings who enjoyed themselves with drinks made from the juice of the chamunad creeper. The god's head was taken back to the cave after the feast, to be taken out again on Songkran day the next year.

## Nang Songkran

Friday, 23 February 2007 01:38 National Culture Commission

The seven daughters of [Kabil Maha Phrom](http://www.thailandlife.com/songkran-festival/origins-of-songkran.html), the god who lost his head as a wager, have their own names, but they are called as a class Nang Songkran or the Songkran Ladies. When any one of them appears in a Songkran Day parade, she rides on a certain kind of animal, seven in number and she rides it in four different postures according to the time she comes. She stands on the animal's back if she comes in the morning rides on its back if she comes in the afternoon, reclines with her eyes open if she comes in the evening, and reclines with her eyes closed if she comes past midnight. All these are based on calculations made by court astrologers. For instance, in the year 1951, the Songkran Lady named Kimitha appeared on the 13th April at 1 o'clock 17 minutes and 56 seconds in the morning. She reclined with her eyes closed on the back of a buffalo. The time she appears is when the sun first enters the sign of Aries which heralds the beginning of Songkran New Year's Day.

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| http://www.thailandlife.com/images/songkran_04.JPG | http://www.thailandlife.com/images/songkran_05.jpg |

Every year before the advent of Songkran the royal astrologer will present his calculations to the King giving all traditional information as predicted by the calculations of the coming year. The artist attached to the court will also paint a picture based on the above information, showing the Songkran Lady and the celestial procession of the god's head. This painting with such information is hung in a convenient and conspicuous place in the Royal Palace precincts for the people's information. This traditional practice was given up many years ago, but still survives in old style printed calender sheets which find a ready demand among the folk. The four postures of the Songkran Lady on the back of her animal according to the time when she first appears as a herald of the New Year, was in the old days, a wise one. The people who were mostly illiterates were able to see at a glance when the New Year or Songkran Day begins. When they see the Songkran Lady reclining with her eyes closed on the back of a buffalo, for example, they know at once that Songkran Day will start past midnight. In such a case there will be four day's celebration instead of three as in other pictures. A picture is more easily retained in memory than a number of figures.



## How to Celebrate Songkran

Friday, 23 February 2007 01:42 National Culture Commission

On the eve of Songkran Day, i.e. on the 12th April, the people clean their house and burn all the refuse. This is a Spring Cleaning Day done as a duty in the belief that anything bad belonging to the old year will be unlucky to the owner if left and carried on to the coming New Year. It is something like a Public Health Cleaning Day but backed by traditional belief has proved more effective to emotional people than prosaic reason.

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| http://www.thailandlife.com/images/monk_05.jpg | http://www.thailandlife.com/images/monk_06.jpg |

Early on the first day of Songkran, the 13th April, the people both young and old in their new clothing go to the Wat or monastery belonging to their village or district to offer food to the monks there. A long table is erected in the compound of the wat where monk's alms bowls stand in a row on either side of the table. Into the alms bowls the gathering people put boiled rice and into the covers of the alms bowls, food, fruits and sweetmeats. Such a performance can be seen at wats outside Bangkok on Songkran Day. While the monks partake of their feast, music sometimes is played to celebrate the occasion.

In the afternoon of the same day there is [bathing ceremony](http://www.thailandlife.com/songkran_004.htm) of the Buddha images and also of the abbot of the wat. After this begins the well-known "water throwing feast". The bathing of images is done as ritualistic ceremony, but it is no other than a New Year's purification. Younger people will also on this day or the succeeding days go to pay their respect to and ask blessings from their elders and respected persons. They will pour scented water into the palms of the old people and present them with a towel and other bathing requisites. In the old days it was an actual bathing where the young people helped the old people to take a bath and to change their old clothing and put on the new clothes which the young people presented them as an act of respect to the aged on the occasion of the New Year.

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| http://www.thailandlife.com/images/ancestors_01.JPG | http://www.thailandlife.com/images/ancestors_02.JPG |

Another duty to be done during the Songkran Festival is a religious service called Bangsakun performed in sacred memory to the dead. When a person died and was cremated, the ashes and charred bones of common people were buried at the root of a sacred fig-tree in a wat. Such trees are to be found in the grounds of almost every wat. It is a symbol of the Lord Buddha's enlightenment for under such a tree did Buddha sit in meditation and receive his enlightenment. If a person is able to erect a Pra Chedi or pagoda in the wat the ashes and bones are then deposited in it. In later times a portion of the bones was sometimes kept in the house in a receptacle. On Songkran Day a religious service in sacred memory to the dead may be officiated by a monk or monks at the place where the ashes and the bones have been deposited, or as in some localities the people bring their dead bones to a village wat in company with others where a joint memorial service is performed. In some parts of the country the guardian spirits of the village and town receive also their annual offerings on Songkran Days. Obviously there are reminiscences or traces of ancestor and animistic worship in by-gone days.

**Bathing Ceremony**

Friday, 23 February 2007 01:43 National Culture Commission

During the three days of Songkran people flock to the wat in their best clothes. They bring with them candles, joss sticks, flowers and small bottles of Thai scented water called "nam ob" or water saturated with perfumes. At the wat shrine each devotee lights a candle and three joss sticks and places them together with a single flower or a bouquet in a receptacle in front of Buddha's altar.

The worshippers then make obeisance to the Buddha by partly prostrating themselves thrice before His image in a prescribed form. Each worshipper kneels with his hands placed palm to palm raising them to the forehead in a worshipful attitude and then prostrates himself on the floor with the hands now separated to allow the forehead to touch the floor between the palms. Such salutation is called "benchangapradit" from the Sanskrit "panchangapratishtha" (fivefold body worship, i.e.. with the forehead, two palms and two knees resting on the floor). Such salutation among the Thai is the highest form of respect. Salutation by full prostration on the ground and "kissing the earth with the forehead" is unknown.

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| http://www.thailandlife.com/images/songkran_15.JPG | http://www.thailandlife.com/images/songkran_002.jpg |

After worshipping in this manner, a little quantity of the scented water is poured on the hands of the Buddha image. Such a ritualistic act is called in Thai "Song Nam Phra Putha Rup" (bathing the Buddha image.)

Not only do the Buddha images in Thailand receive the ceremonial bath, but elders of the family and elder monks may receive it too. Here is an account of the bathing of family elders. In Bangkok, especially among the upper class, people are want to make a traditional call on their elders to pay their respects during Songkran. This they do by pouring scented water into the palms of the elder who will then duly rub it lightly on his head and face. The elder, in the old days, would then be presented by the visitors with a "phanung" (loin cloth) and a "pha khao ma" for a male or a "pha hom" for a female, both of which constituted everyday wear in those days.

Nowadays the elder is presented with a towel, a box of handkerchiefs, a box of soap or other such articles and sometimes with a bottle of scented water. After the presentation the elder will bestow his blessing and best wishes upon the relatives for the New Year.

A gift of a bottle of scented water is specially appreciated by the older generation who are want to smear themselves during the hot season with a preparation of soft chalk powder called "din saw phong" mixed with scented water which is refreshing to the skin. Sometimes the powder is ready-mixed with attar of roses and may be applied lightly with a towel or handkerchief. Such toilet preparation is called "paeng sod" or fresh toilet powder.

In the old days, the ceremonial bath was the regular family thing. The elder would seat himself on a broad bench. The children would assist him in the bathing by pouring the scented water on him. They also would furnish him with a new set of clothing to be worn after the bath. Further they would present him with the traditional candles, joss sticks and flowers emblems denoting the highest respect among the Thai.

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| http://www.thailandlife.com/images/monk_03.JPG | http://www.thailandlife.com/images/monk_04.jpg |

We now come to the ceremonial bath of a monk. It may take place on any of the three days of Songkran. The monk is usually the abbot of the monastery, who is invariably held in high esteem, usually old and, in the case of a village wat, a leading personage in the community life. People call him "Luang Phaw" (Great Father). He is not only their spiritual father but also their adviser in temporal affairs in the light of his recognised wide knowledge and experience. Sometimes he combines the versatility of doctor, astrologer and adapt in the mystical and magical arts separately or all rolled into one.

He is always an unquestioned mediator in disputes; the villagers, in most cases prefer to abide by their "Luang Phaw's" decision rather than report to the courts or other local authorities.

It is not difficult to see, therefore, that such a man would command hosts of disciples falling over each other to do him the traditional honour of a ceremonial bath. But in such cases a notice is circulated before-hand specifying the exact day and time of the ceremony which is the same as for the elder of a family. After the bath the abbot gives a sermon followed by his blessing for a happy New Year.

**Building Sand Pagodas**

Friday, 23 February 2007 01:45 National Culture Commission

It has been the custom in some wats to hold a festival of building "phrasai." Phrasai" is an abbreviated form of "phra chedi sai" (sand-pagodas). " Phrachedi" means pagoda and "sai" sand. This festival takes place on an open space in the wat. The sand to be used for the occasion is provided by the wat and piled up nearby. The pagoda builders, mostly women and children, will come to the wat in their best clothes. They will buy candles, joss sticks, flower and banners from the wat stalls set up in the compound. Buying these articles from the wat is regarded as "tham bun" ("merit making"). Some will bring along these requisites, but nevertheless, they will contribute money to "tham bun" as well.

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| http://www.thailandlife.com/images/sandcastles_01.jpg | http://www.thailandlife.com/images/sandcastles_02.JPG |
| Before the people start to arrive, some monks prepare the temple compound with piles of sand. While others make the flags that will be stuck in the "sand pagodas". | |

The merit makers will then fetch sand in the silver bowls which they have brought along with them and carry them to the ceremonial ground and start building a sand pagoda something like a pyramid. The size of the pagoda is optional. The sand is mixed with water to make it lump together when used to build the pagoda. A coin and and a leaf of the religious fig tree will be buried inside the sand pagoda. When finished the pagoda is sprinkled with scented water and decorated with flags and banners. The base of the pagoda is then covered with a small piece of yellow or red cloth. Lighted candles and joss sticks and flowers are stuck around the sand pagoda as an offering. Some of these pagodas, usually the big ones, are beautifully decorated with miniature ceremonial latticed fences surrounding them.

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| http://www.thailandlife.com/images/sandcastles_03.jpg | http://www.thailandlife.com/images/sandcastles_04.jpg | http://www.thailandlife.com/images/sandcastles_05.jpg |
| Once the "sand pagodas" are finished, lighted joss sticks are placed in the sand as well as flags with money attached to the stem. As the joss sticks are placed into the sand, the builders say a small prayer. | | |

Sometimes people vie with each other in building such pagodas. The ceremonial ground itself is decorated with ceremonial latticed fences called "rachawat" and banners. There is a theatrical performances in the wat on that day for the merit makers to enjoy themselves. It is a one-day festival and the wat benefits by the sand which the devotees bring. For it serves to raise the level of the ground which normally is too low during the flood season. As the open ground in the wat also serves as a meeting place for the community during the religious and festive occasions, it is ultimately the public in general who benefit by this religious custom.

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| http://www.thailandlife.com/images/sandcastles_06.jpg | http://www.thailandlife.com/images/sandcastles_07.jpg |
| Building the "sand pagodas" is a family event that goes on all afternoon. As the sun goes down, everyone stops and a prize is given to the best "sand pagoda". | |

The sand pagodas do not last long. Unless they are jealously guarded, mischievous children will take pleasure in prying them open and thus ruining them in order to get the coins inside. The bigger ones are usually the selected targets.

**Sand Pagoda Competition**

Friday, 23 February 2007 01:46 Panrit "Gor" Daoruang

In the afternoon of April 13th, we went to Wat Bangnanggreng in Samut Prakan, to take some pictures of the people making sand pagodas. By the time we arrived they were already nearly a hundred people. Some of them had been at it for a couple of hours. The monk told me that everyone had to finish by 6 p.m. when he will judge the best sand pagoda.

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| http://www.thailandlife.com/images/sandcastles_08.jpg | http://www.thailandlife.com/images/sandcastles_09.jpg |
| Some people were making the sand pagodas in groups of friends and others were doing it as a family. | |

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| http://www.thailandlife.com/images/sandcastles_10.jpg | http://www.thailandlife.com/images/sandcastles_11.jpg |
| A lot of detail was given to the sand pagodas. With a walkway and decorations. You can see in the right picture that they are also writing on the pagoda. | |

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| http://www.thailandlife.com/images/sandcastles_12.jpg | http://www.thailandlife.com/images/sandcastles_13.jpg |
| Here the pagodas are nearly finished. Incense sticks and little flags are stuck into the sand pagoda. In the right picture you can see that the little boy is saying a prayer. | |

**Songkran Water Fights**

Friday, 23 February 2007 01:49 Panrit "Gor" Daoruang

Although Songkran officially starts on the 13th April, some people like to get the festivities off to an early start. After all, four days isn't usually enough time for a water fight. The pictures on the following pages were taken while I was having a break from the fun. I went around in a car for a couple of hours to try and give you a feeling of what it is like on the streets. All of these pictures were taken in Paknam in Samut Prakan. Most provinces would be the same as this.

**More Water Fights**

Friday, 23 February 2007 01:53 Panrit "Gor" Daoruang

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| http://www.thailandlife.com/images/songkran_24.JPG |
| Everyone loves motorcycles. Even on the main highways, mobs form a human chain across the roads to slow them down. This group will soon be very wet! |

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| http://www.thailandlife.com/images/songkran_22.jpg |
| But, the best way of getting around is on the back of pick-up trucks. Each one armed to the teeth with big barrels of water to keep them going for a few hours. |

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| http://www.thailandlife.com/images/songkran_21.jpg |
| It would seem that every pick-up truck in Paknam is driving down this one road for an afternoon of fun! |

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| http://www.thailandlife.com/images/songkran_25.JPG |
| The kids on the back of this pick-up truck look like they are having some fun. |

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| http://www.thailandlife.com/images/songkran_26.jpg |
| Be prepared to get very wet. These girls were on the receiving end of quite a few buckets of water. |

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| http://www.thailandlife.com/images/songkran_27.jpg |
| With so many pick-up trucks passing each other, there is no rest from the water fights |

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| http://www.thailandlife.com/images/songkran_28.jpg |
| All of the girls are prime targets to have white powder smeared on their faces. Traditionally they would ask permission first but these days they often attack from behind. |

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| http://www.thailandlife.com/images/songkran_29.jpg |
| The guy on this motorbike thinks he can defend himself with a sprinkler! |

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| http://www.thailandlife.com/images/songkran_30.jpg |
| These three people on the back of the motorcycle didn't have anywhere to run to. They just had to wait there for the water to be |

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| http://www.thailandlife.com/images/songkran_16.jpg |
| Traffic Control. During Songkran, the mob is in control of the roads and if you are on a motorbike and they ask you to slow down then you'd better do what they say. |

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| http://www.thailandlife.com/images/songkran_23.jpg |
| This way please, slow down so that we can throw water on you! No, there isn't any ice in the buckets! |

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| http://www.thailandlife.com/images/songkran_18.jpg |
| That was fun wasn't it? |

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| http://www.thailandlife.com/images/songkran_19.jpg |
| Motorcyclists are prime targets as they don't have any guns to fire back with. The two girls on the back of this bike have their faces smeared with white powder. |

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| http://www.thailandlife.com/images/songkran_17.jpg |
| Two pick-up trucks passing each other slow down to fire all guns at the enemy. |

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| http://www.thailandlife.com/images/songkran_20.jpg |
| A bunch of very wet girls having fun! |

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| Songkran in Phra Pradaeng 2011 |

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| Written by Richard Barrow |
| Friday, 18 April 2008 |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | | http://www.paknam.com/images/stories/IMG_1460.jpg | http://www.paknam.com/images/stories/IMG_2285.jpg |  |  | | --- | |  |   **UPDATE: The Songkran Festival in Pra Pradaeng this year is 22-24 April 2011. The parade will be on the afternoon of the last day.**  The Phra Pradaeng Songkran Festival, formerly known as the 'Pak Lat Songkran Festival', was similar to Songkran celebrated in the other regions of the country, with the notable addition of a colourful and elaborate Songkran procession staged by the Mon, or Raman, residents of Phra Pradaeng. It is also held later than the rest of the country taking place on the first weekend after 13th April. The highlight of the festival is a grand procession of floral floats carrying beautiful maidens dressed in a traditional Mon, or Raman, costume. Each holds a fish bowl in one hand and a bird cage in the other. Other maidens, accompanied by men dressed in traditional Raman costume of sarong and round-necked shirt and sash (the costume is called "choot loy chai"), walk in front of the 'Songkran beauty queen'.  Each year the Phra Pradaeng Songkran parade features between 10 to 20 processions. Each procession is made up of a Songkran vehicle decorated with beautiful flowers. The vehicle of the lead procession transports the incumbent Miss Songkran surrounded by her entourage. She is seated and holds a replica of the severed head of the Lord Tao Maha Songkran. The procession also includes a file of graceful girls dressed in traditional Thai-Raman costumes. Some of them hold a fishbowl; others hold a birdcage and the remainder walk ahead of the Songkran vehicle. They in turn are flanked by Raman youths dressed in Choot Loy Chai costumes, consisting of a sarong, round-necked shirt and scarf which is worn with the tails dangling behind. The men's job is to ensure that everything goes smoothly.   |  |  | | --- | --- | | http://www.paknam.com/images/stories/IMG_1330.jpg | http://www.paknam.com/images/stories/IMG_2957.jpg |   The procession of the Tao Maha Songkran "head" is a unique aspect of the Phra Padaeng Songkran celebrations. According to ancient beliefs, there was once a kind and benevolent god who cared greatly for mankind. His name was Tao Maha Songkran. He had seven daughters, each one a goddess representing a day of the week. The annual Miss Songkran winner is seen holding the head of Lord Tao Maha Songkran, (also known as Tao Mahapraphrom) — a gesture believed to bring good fortune to mankind.  Noted for the continued preservation of ancient customs and traditions, the Songkran festival at Phra Pradaeng is no less of an attraction and draws local and overseas tourists alike.  **THAI-RAMAN FLAG CEREMONY** Each village makes its own centipede flag, which is carried in a ceremonial flag procession along the road to be draped on the swan pillars at various temples. The flag, the symbol of the Thai-Raman people, is of Buddhist significance and incorporates the spirit of unity.  **SABA** A demonstration of traditional Raman games such as saba, a pitch and toss game played with beans. Various indigenous games of Thai-Raman origin being staged in designated villages from 08.30 to midnight during the festival period. In saba, a traditional Raman games, young Raman lads and lasses engage in a lively dialogue, accompanied by song and dance. This is a quaint custom, which is now rarely witnessed. |

Read more: <http://www.paknam.com/festivals/songkran-in-phra-pradaeng.html#ixzz1Wfca8Uuu>

The most obvious celebration of Songkran is the throwing of water. Thais roam the streets with containers of water or water guns (sometimes mixed with mentholated talc), or post themselves at the side of roads with a garden hose and drench each other and passersby. This, however, was not always the main activity of this festival. Songkran was traditionally a time to visit and pay respects to elders, including family members, friends, neighbors, and monks.

Besides the throwing of water, people celebrating Songkran may also go to a [wat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thai_temple_art_and_architecture) (Buddhist monastery) to pray and give food to monks. They may also cleanse [Buddha](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddha) images from household shrines as well as Buddha images at monasteries by gently pouring water mixed with a Thai fragrance ([Thai](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thai_language): น้ำอบไทย) over them. It is believed that doing this will bring good luck and prosperity for the New Year. In many cities, such as [Chiang Mai](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiang_Mai), the Buddha images from all of the city's important monasteries are paraded through the streets so that people can toss water at them, ritually 'bathing' the images, as they pass by on ornately decorated floats. In northern Thailand, people may carry handfuls of sand to their neighborhood monastery in order to recompense the dirt that they have carried away on their feet during the rest of the year. The sand is then sculpted into [stupa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stupa)-shaped piles and decorated with colorful flags.

Some people make New Year resolutions - to refrain from bad behavior, or to do good things. Songkran is a time for cleaning and renewal. Besides washing household Buddha images, many Thais also take this opportunity to give their home a thorough cleaning.

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Tuktuk_chiangmai_songkran_05b.jpg)

[http://bits.wikimedia.org/skins-1.17/common/images/magnify-clip.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Tuktuk_chiangmai_songkran_05b.jpg)

People in a [tuk tuk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tuk_tuk) getting soaked during Songkran in [Chiang Mai](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiang_Mai)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Songkran-4-KayEss-1.jpeg)

[http://bits.wikimedia.org/skins-1.17/common/images/magnify-clip.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Songkran-4-KayEss-1.jpeg)

The use of [chalk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chalk) ([Thai](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thai_language): ดินสอพอง) is also very common having originated in the chalk used by monks to mark blessings.

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Songkran.jpg)

[http://bits.wikimedia.org/skins-1.17/common/images/magnify-clip.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Songkran.jpg)

Some children having fun at the Bangkok Zoo during Songkran.

The throwing of water originated as a way to pay respect to people, by capturing the water after it had been poured over the Buddhas for cleansing and then using this "blessed" water to give good fortune to elders and family by gently pouring it on the shoulder. Among young people the holiday evolved to include dousing strangers with water to relieve the heat, since April is the hottest month in Thailand (temperatures can rise to over 100°F or 40°C on some days). This has further evolved into water fights and splashing water over people riding in vehicles.

Nowadays, the emphasis is on fun and water-throwing rather than on the festival's spiritual and religious aspects, which sometimes prompts complaints from traditionalists. In recent years there have been calls to moderate the festival to lessen the many alcohol-related road accidents as well as injuries attributed to extreme behavior such as water being thrown in the faces of traveling motorcyclists.

The water is meant as a symbol of washing all of the bad away and is sometimes filled with fragrant herbs when celebrated in the traditional manner.

Songkran is also celebrated in many places with a pageant in which young women demonstrate their beauty and unique talents, as judged by the audience. The level of financial support usually determines the winner, since, to show your support you must purchase necklaces which you place on your chosen girl.

## Astrological calculation

Although the [traditional calendar of Thailand](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thai_lunar_calendar) like most of [Southeast Asia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southeast_Asia) utilizes a [lunisolar calendar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lunisolar_calendar), the date of the new year was calculated on a purely solar basis. The term *Songkran* comes from [Sanskrit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanskrit) "Sankranta" and means "a move or change" - in this case the move of the sun into the [Aries](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aries_(astrology)) [zodiac](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zodiac). Originally this happened at the [vernal equinox](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vernal_equinox), but, as the Thai [astrology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astrology) did not observe [precession](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Precession), the date moved from March to April.

There is a similar named Indian Festival called as *Sankrant* or *Makar Sankranti* [[1]](http://www.festivalsofindia.in/makarsankranti), celebrated on 14 January every year. Songkran as such has similarity to Indian festival of [Holi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holi).

The [traditional new year](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinhala_and_Tamil_new_year) celebration in [Sri Lanka](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri_Lanka) also coincides with the Thai new year.The Tamil New year, The Bengali, Nepali, Orissan and Malayali New years in south Asia also fall on the same day as the Thai new year

## Greetings

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Songkran_in_Wat_Kungthapao_05.jpg)

[http://bits.wikimedia.org/skins-1.17/common/images/magnify-clip.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Songkran_in_Wat_Kungthapao_05.jpg)

Monks receiving blessing at a temple in [Ban Khung Taphao](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ban_Khung_Taphao)

The traditional greeting is "สวัสดีปีใหม่" (*sa-wat-di pi mai*), basically "Happy New Year". [*Sawatdi*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thai_greeting) is also used for "hello" or "goodbye". *Pi* and *mai* mean "year" and "new" respectively in Thai. Another greeting used is "สุขสันต์วันปีใหม่" (*suk-san wan pi mai*), where *suksan* means "happy".

However, most people use "สุขสันต์วันสงกรานต์" (*suk-san wan songkran*) — meaning "Happy Songkran Day" — since *pi mai* is more often linked with the first of January. *Suksan* is also used as an attribute for other days such as [Valentine's Day](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valentine%27s_Day) ("สุขสันต์วันแห่งความรัก" *suk-san wan haeng khwam rak*; Happy Valentine's Day).

The most obvious celebration of Songkran is the throwing of water. Thais roam the streets with containers of water or water guns (sometimes mixed with mentholated talc), or post themselves at the side of roads with a garden hose and drench each other and passersby. This, however, was not always the main activity of this festival. Songkran was traditionally a time to visit and pay respects to elders, including family members, friends, neighbors, and monks.

Besides the throwing of water, people celebrating Songkran may also go to a [wat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thai_temple_art_and_architecture) (Buddhist monastery) to pray and give food to monks. They may also cleanse [Buddha](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddha) images from household shrines as well as Buddha images at monasteries by gently pouring water mixed with a Thai fragrance ([Thai](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thai_language): น้ำอบไทย) over them. It is believed that doing this will bring good luck and prosperity for the New Year. In many cities, such as [Chiang Mai](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiang_Mai), the Buddha images from all of the city's important monasteries are paraded through the streets so that people can toss water at them, ritually 'bathing' the images, as they pass by on ornately decorated floats. In northern Thailand, people may carry handfuls of sand to their neighborhood monastery in order to recompense the dirt that they have carried away on their feet during the rest of the year. The sand is then sculpted into [stupa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stupa)-shaped piles and decorated with colorful flags.

Some people make New Year resolutions - to refrain from bad behavior, or to do good things. Songkran is a time for cleaning and renewal. Besides washing household Buddha images, many Thais also take this opportunity to give their home a thorough cleaning.

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Tuktuk_chiangmai_songkran_05b.jpg)

People in a [tuk tuk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tuk_tuk) getting soaked during Songkran in [Chiang Mai](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiang_Mai)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Songkran-4-KayEss-1.jpeg)

The use of [chalk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chalk) ([Thai](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thai_language): ดินสอพอง) is also very common having originated in the chalk used by monks to mark blessings.

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Songkran.jpg)

Some children having fun at the Bangkok Zoo during Songkran.

The throwing of water originated as a way to pay respect to people, by capturing the water after it had been poured over the Buddhas for cleansing and then using this "blessed" water to give good fortune to elders and family by gently pouring it on the shoulder. Among young people the holiday evolved to include dousing strangers with water to relieve the heat, since April is the hottest month in Thailand (temperatures can rise to over 100°F or 40°C on some days). This has further evolved into water fights and splashing water over people riding in vehicles.

Nowadays, the emphasis is on fun and water-throwing rather than on the festival's spiritual and religious aspects, which sometimes prompts complaints from traditionalists. In recent years there have been calls to moderate the festival to lessen the many alcohol-related road accidents as well as injuries attributed to extreme behavior such as water being thrown in the faces of traveling motorcyclists.

The water is meant as a symbol of washing all of the bad away and is sometimes filled with fragrant herbs when celebrated in the traditional manner.

Songkran is also celebrated in many places with a pageant in which young women demonstrate their beauty and unique talents, as judged by the audience. The level of financial support usually determines the winner, since, to show your support you must purchase necklaces which you place on your chosen girl.

## Astrological calculation

Although the [traditional calendar of Thailand](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thai_lunar_calendar) like most of [Southeast Asia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southeast_Asia) utilizes a [lunisolar calendar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lunisolar_calendar), the date of the new year was calculated on a purely solar basis. The term *Songkran* comes from [Sanskrit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanskrit) "Sankranta" and means "a move or change" - in this case the move of the sun into the [Aries](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aries_(astrology)) [zodiac](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zodiac). Originally this happened at the [vernal equinox](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vernal_equinox), but, as the Thai [astrology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astrology) did not observe [precession](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Precession), the date moved from March to April.

There is a similar named Indian Festival called as *Sankrant* or *Makar Sankranti* [[1]](http://www.festivalsofindia.in/makarsankranti), celebrated on 14 January every year. Songkran as such has similarity to Indian festival of [Holi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holi).

The [traditional new year](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinhala_and_Tamil_new_year) celebration in [Sri Lanka](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri_Lanka) also coincides with the Thai new year.The Tamil New year, The Bengali, Nepali, Orissan and Malayali New years in south Asia also fall on the same day as the Thai new year

## Greetings

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## In other calendars

Songkran is also celebrated in [Laos](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laos) (called [pee mai lao](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lao_New_Year)), [Cambodia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cambodia) (called Chaul Chnam Thmey, [Cambodian New Year](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cambodian_New_Year)), [Myanmar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myanmar) (called [Thingyan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thingyan)), and by the [Dai people](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dai_people) in [Yunnan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yunnan), [China](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China) (called [Water-Splashing Festival](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Water-Splashing_Festival)). The same day is celebrated in South Asian calendars as well: the [Assamese](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assamese_people) (called [Rongali Bihu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bohag_Bihu)), [Bengali](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bengali_people) (called [Pohela Boishakh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pohela_Boishakh)), [Oriya](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oriya_people) (called Maha Visuba [Sankranthi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sankranthi)), [Malayali](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malayali), [Punjabi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Punjabi_culture), [Sinhalese](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinhala_people), and [Tamil](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_people) New Years fall on the same dates, based on the astrological event of the sun beginning its northward journey. And, as mentioned above, there is an Indian Festival called as Sankrant or [Makar Sankranti](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Makar_Sankranti) in [Marathi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marathi_language), celebrated every year on 14 January. Songkran as such is similar to the Indian festival of [Holi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holi), with a lot of splashing of water as paints, colored dusts, and fragances.

The traditional new year celebration in [Sri Lanka](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri_Lanka) also coincides with the Thai new year.

In [Nepal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nepal), the official new year is celebrated on the 1st of [Baisakh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baisakh) (Baisākh) according to astrological calendar [Vikram Samwat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vikram_Samwat) and day often falls somewhere between 12-15 April.

It occurs at the same time as that given by [Bede](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bede) for [festivals](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Festival) of [Eostre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eostre)—and [Easter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easter) weekend occasionally coincides with Songkran (most recently 1979, 1990, and 2001, but not again until 2085).[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Songkran#cite_note-1)