

FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

Laos celebrates many annual festivals called "Boun" in the Lao Language which are particularly enjoyable and beautiful, signifying traditional aspects of Lao lifestyle. Most festivals are connected with religion and the yearly rice farming cycle. The timing of the festivals is calculated according to the Buddhist lunar calendar, thus changing every year. Please check the latest information before visiting these events.

MARHA PUHA (FEBRUARY)



This festival is held during the third full moon of the lunar calendar at the "Wat" (temple) in the morning for the purpose of commemorating the speech given by Buddha to 1,250 enlightened monks. Temple goers circumnavigate the Wat three times with candles in a ceremony known as vien tian. Boun Khao Chi - special bread of sticky rice, coated with egg and then grilled, is made and offered to the monks. This offering occurs during Makha boucha.

BOUN PI MAI – LAO NEW YEAR (APRIL)



Boun Pi Mai is one of the most important dates in the Lao calendar to celebrate Lao New Year. Although the Lao new year is celebrated in joyous spirit throughout the country, nowhere hosts more ancient traditions and colorful pageantry than the northern heritage city of Luang Prabang. Lasting several days in mid-April, this is the celebration of the Laos New Year and is a combination of merriment and meditation. Similar to festivals at this time of year in other Southeast Asian countries - particularly Thailand - Boun Pimai is celebrated with parades, dancing, singing and enthusiastic water throwing. The religious aspects of the festival are most apparent in Luang Prabang, where Buddha images are worshiped with water pouring ceremonies. Temple compounds are further decorated with small sand Stupas, offered as merit towards good fortune and health.

BOUN BANG FAI – ROCKET FESTIVAL (MAY)



The festival is a call for rain and a celebration of fertility. In the afternoon, people gather in the fields on the outskirts of villages and towns to launch self-made firework rockets. Different communities compete for the best decorated and the highest travelling rocket. Men disguised as women perform vaudeville acts using wooden phalli in order to anger the gods. As revenge, the gods are expected to send thunderstorms. The Boun Bang Fai or Rocket Festival, marks the sixth month of the lunar calendar. During the festival, rockets are fired into the air to ask the god of rain to help nature a good harvest free from drought, floods or pests. Various villages throughout the country take part in one that most boisterous festivals on the Lao calendar.

BOAT RACING FESTIVAL (SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER)



Boat racing is a local festival that takes place every year all around the country during September and October. Most Laos traditional boat racing festivals take place before the end of Buddhist lent. Dates vary from year to year, but most festivals are held on weekends. Traditionally, after the rice planting season (toward the end of rainy season) villages on the river banks prepare themselves for the upcoming boat racing festival in and around their communities. Dragon boats (long boats built specifically for racing purposes) are taken down from their houses onto the rivers. Teams of rowers start practising weeks or months before the boat racing season arrives. In the countryside where Lao tradition still runs deep, every household in the host village prepares special food and drinks. One type of food that almost every household prepares for their guests are noodles (Khao Poon in Lao). As guests arrive at their houses they are offered some noodles and something to drink. This tradition has been carried on for generations. The biggest and the most significant boat racing festival (Boun Xuang Heua) in Laos is held at the end of Buddhist lent (Awk Phansa) in Vientiane, on the Mekong River.