



FESTIVALS IN CAMBODIA

November 25th, 2019



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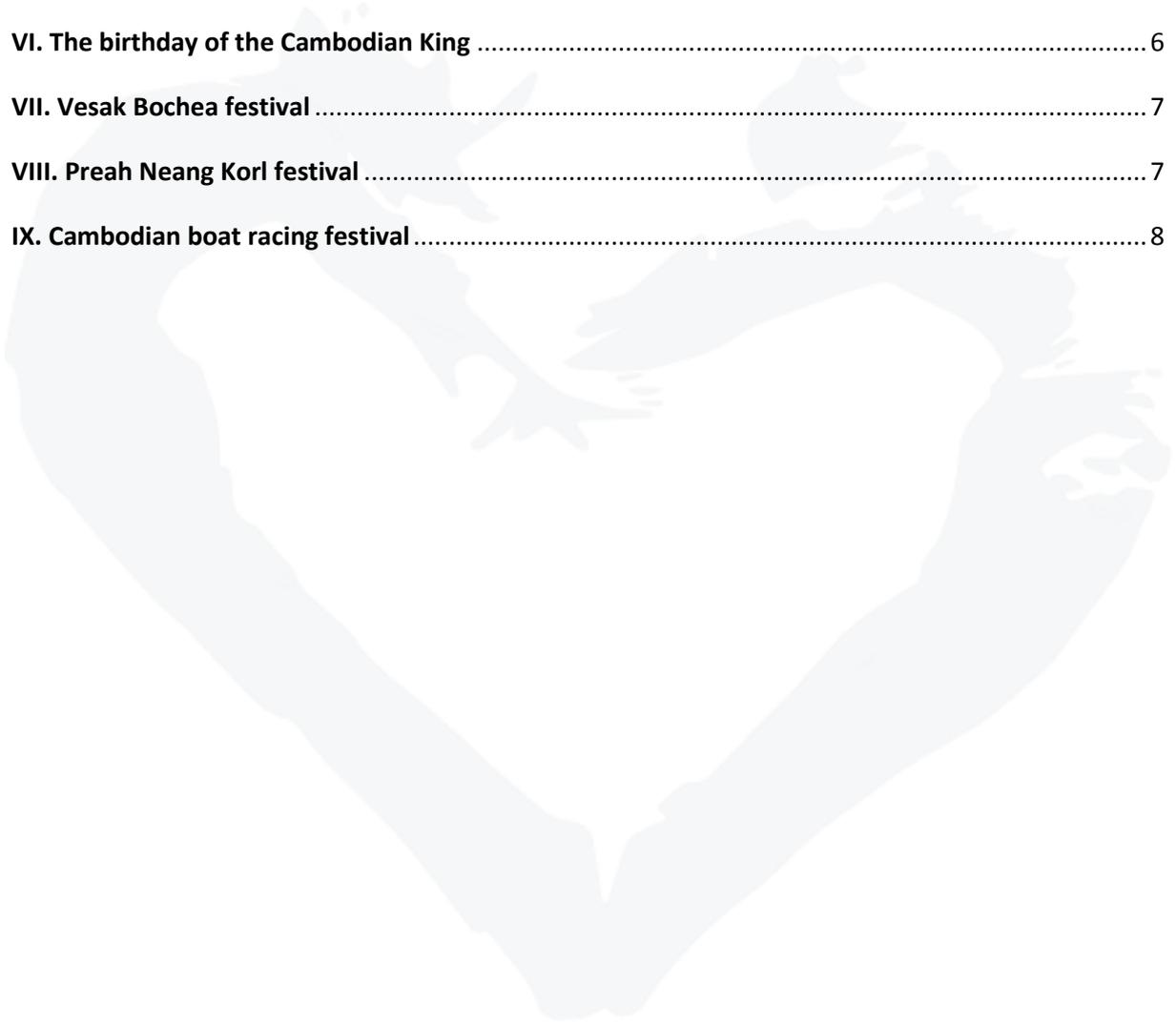
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I. Chôl Chnăm Thmây New Year festival

1. The meaning

Chôl Chnăm Thmây New Year festival means welcoming the new year which is similar to the Vietnamese Lunar New Year. The festival displays the wishes and the hope of the people about a lucky and happy new year. Besides, Cho Chl Chnam Thmay also means to end the drought period, entering the period of abundant water to prepare for the next crop.

2. When to hold the festival?

The festival is held around mid-April of the calendar year. The festival lasts for 3 days, the leap year lasts for 4 days, the name of each day is different.

- The name's first day: Maha Songkran (Chos Songkran thmây)
- The name's second day: Wanabat (Wonbōf)
- The name's third day: Tngai Laeung Saka (Luong Sang)

3. The characteristics of the festival

The people will have the chance to wear new clothes and shopping for the necessary items for the family. The houses are cleaned and decorated carefully. The women prepare food and drinks during the holiday. The children are bought new clothes. Previously, people pounded rice to make traditional cakes, today they prepare rice and food such as fish, meat, vegetables, and fruit. The people stop temporarily the daily work to make ready for the Tet holiday.

Every family makes a big feast, burns incense, light a lamp, offers off for the old Têvôđa, and welcomes the new Têvôđa. On the altar, there are five branches of flowers, 5 candles, 5 incense sticks, 5 green rice flakes, and many fruits. The whole family sits cross-legged in front of the ancestor altar, praying, hoping and believing that they would be blessed by the gods.

The activities in three days:

- The first day: People take a bath, wear nice clothes, bring the big feast for the temple. The people will go at the selected good hours, regardless of morning or afternoon (usually at 7 a.m or 5 p.m).

Everyone brought gifts: incense and fruits to the temple to perform the "New Māh Songkran" procession. Under Mr. Acha's direction, people line up and go around the main hall three times to celebrate the New Year. At night, the people listen to the monks chanting prayers for the New Year, and enjoy the four dharma of the Buddha (life long, healthy, happier, and beauties), and then



listen to the meaning of Chól Chnẵm Thmây ceremony. After that, the younger sing and dance together in front of the temple yard.

- The second day is called Thngay Von-boch: each family makes an offering ceremony in the early morning and at noon to the monks. In the afternoon, people carry out a ceremony of "making a sand mountain" (Puôn phnom khsach) right on the temple grounds, in hopes of meeting good things.
- The third day is called Thngay Lon-sak: this is the main day and also the last day of Tet. People perform a ceremony to bathe Buddha statues with scented water, and then bathe the elderly monks at the temple, to wash away the dust of the old year and ready to enter the new year with a completely clean body. The next activity is the ceremony called praying for the peace of somebody's soul (Bang Skol). At noon, everyone went home to carry out the bathing ritual for the Buddha statue in each family to express the gratitude to the Buddha, and to congratulate their parents, grandparents as well as wash out the bad things of the old year and welcome the new year.

II. Bom Chaul Chnam festival

1. The meaning

Bom Chaul Chnam is held to celebrate the success of rice harvest. It is a very important festival of the Khmer people - a country with a long-standing agricultural civilization.

2. When to hold the festival?

The festival is held on 3 days lasting from 13th to 15th April each year.

3. The characteristics of the festival

Before the festival, the people will clean and prepare all the necessary items for the festival. It will take place immediately after religious ceremonies at the temples. People will meet, congratulate and splash water on each other in hopes of a more productive crop next year. For Cambodian people, water brings good and prosperous things, thus they not only throw water on people around them but also splash water on houses, animals and production tools. The traditional Apsara dance will appear during the festival and it is one of the main activities of this festival.



III. Bon Om Touk festival

1. The meaning

Bon Om Touk, also known as Water Festival. The festival is held to commemorate a natural event that is backward flows between the Bien Lake and the Mekong River. Bien Lake has a great influence on the lives of fishermen and farmers in Cambodia. It provides abundant fishes, shrimps and alluvial deposits for the field. So it's no surprise that the Khmer people have celebrated the Bon Om Touk water festival in Cambodia over the past centuries.

2. When to hold the festival?

The festival takes place once a year, on the full-moon day in the Buddhist month and lasts for 3 days.

3. The characteristics of the festival

The Bon Om Touk Water Festival in Cambodia lasts for 3 days, therefore people take a holiday and go to the river to celebrate. The unique boat races on the river are the main attraction of the festival. Besides, there are also performances of traditional Khmer music and dance.

There are 3 small ceremonies in the unique Bon Om Touk water festival in Cambodia

- Loy Pratip is a parade on the river in the evening. The whole river will be brightly lit by the lights on the boats.
- Sampeas Preah Khe is the moon prayer ceremony. The full moon is always seen as a good sign for the upcoming harvest season. Thus, during the Bon Om Touk water festival, Cambodians always pray under the moon for a good harvest.
- Auk Ambok: at midnight, the ceremony is held at the temple and people will eat Ambok - holiday food. Ambok is simply a rice dish rolled flat, it is fried and served with bananas and coconut.

IV. Meak Bochea Festival

1. The meaning

This grand festival is held to honor the Buddha and his teachings



2. When to hold the festival?

The festival usually takes place on the full moon day of the third lunar month every year.

3. The characteristics of the festival

Meak Bochea is a very important festival in Cambodia. During the festival, Buddhists will pray, offer food and take part in the procession of the candles at a temple.

Meak Bochea Festival is usually held in large temples, Buddhists gather here in the Buddhist color space. They meditate together and think about life. A unique event during this festival is that Buddhists will offer food and take part in candlelight exchanges at a large temple.

In Meak Bochea's main festival of 2013, there were over 2000 Buddhists flock to Mount Odong to celebrate Buddha's birthday. The ceremony was hosted by two monks.

V. Pchum Ben festival

1. The meaning

Pchum Ben, also known as Dak Ben, is a festival to honor the dead of the Khmer. This is a very important and sacred holiday, lasts for 15 days.

2. When to hold the festival

Pchum Ben is celebrated on October 15 of the Khmer lunar calendar and lasts for 15 days.

3. The characteristics

During this holiday, the Khmer are encouraged to visit at least 7 temples to pray for their ancestors. Candles will guide the souls of the dead to offerings. The Khmer will throw rice-sesame seeds around the temple complex. This ritual helps to nourish souls which wandering around the world. This festival is especially meaningful for people who have relatives who were killed by the Khmer Rouge.

VI. The birthday of the Cambodian King

1. The meaning

The birthday celebration of the King of Cambodia - the head of the country.



2. When to hold the festival?

The celebration is held from May 13-15.

3. The characteristics

The birthday celebration of the King of Cambodia will include two major activities: making offerings to monks and giving gifts to the poor in Cambodia. But the government will give people three days off. On the streets, there are many banners and dancing performances to celebrate the birthday of the Cambodian King.

VII. Vesak Bochea festival

1. The meaning

Vesak Bochea is a festival held to commemorate the three important milestones of the Buddha: the birth, enlightenment and the enter of the realms of Nirvana.

2. When to hold the festival?

The festival takes place on April 17 of the lunar calendar.

3. The characteristics of the festival

Buddhists will perform rituals at the temple and give food and clothes to local monks.

For Cambodian Buddhists, Vesak Bochea is celebrated at Buddhist pagoda including activities such as meditation, chanting, and sermon. People can bring food, candles, and incense to make offerings to the high-age monks at temples. All ages can welcome monks and nuns with devotion, they hold candles, compress incense and lotus flower. Thousands of monks from places of painting around the country are also invited to make offerings to the four things, pray for the blessings in the future.

VIII. Preah Neang Korl festival

1. The meaning

Preah Neang Kor Festival is held with the meaning of forecasting the weather of a new crop and the type of tree that will bring high efficiency.



2. When to hold the festival?

The festival is usually held at the beginning of the rainy season, the 4th day of June lunar month.

3. The characteristics of the festival

At the beginning of the ceremony, the monks will pray for and bless the royal family and the country's leaders as well as the people.

The next activity, the Cambodian royal family, possibly the King and Queen, will control the cows and plow 3 times in a symbolic field.

Finally, the cows will be led to 7 gold trays which hold a number of seeds such as rice, corn, sesame seeds, beans, grass, water, and wine. Cambodians believe that if cows choose to eat the seeds, it is a sign that the harvest next year will be good. If the cows choose other trays such as water or wine, that will be a warning for a bad weather year.

IX. Cambodian boat racing festival

1. The meaning

The festival is held to commemorate the seafarers who sacrificed to build the Angkor cathedral. At the same time, the festival is an opportunity for the Khmer to show their traditional cultural identity and patriotism.

2. When to hold the festival?

The festival is held on the 24 to 26 November of each calendar year on the Mekong River in Phnom Penh

3. The characteristics of the festival

There are many activities taking place throughout the festival such as boat racing, fireworks display, boat show on the river attracting thousands of people from all over to Phnom Penh.

The boat racing ceremony is held during the day, while in the evening, the boats decorated with colored lights that will be floated on the river with the brilliant fireworks display. During the festival, hundreds of thousands of Cambodians and foreign tourists have flocked to Phnom Penh, contributing to creating a busy atmosphere for the festival and motivating the spirit for the rowers.





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