

The logo for the ASEAN Festival Primer. It features the word "ASEAN" in large, bold, sans-serif capital letters, each a different color: A (purple), S (blue), E (orange), A (pink), and N (green). Above the "E" is the word "The" in a smaller, black, sans-serif font. Below "ASEAN" is the word "Festival Primer" in a black, sans-serif font, with "Festival" and "Primer" separated by a space.

## YOUR GUIDE TO THE REMARKABLE FESTIVALS OF SOUTHEAST ASIA



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# ●● MAP OF ASEAN

THE PHILIPPINES



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## INTRODUCTION ●●

### It's festival time across Southeast Asia!

Welcome to the **ASEAN Festival Primer**, your at-a-glance handy guide to just a few of the diverse and exciting festivals that take place every year across Southeast Asia. The ASEAN diaspora is itself a myriad of cultures, religions and beliefs, and as a result the sheer range of festivals occurring on an annual basis in this hemisphere is quite overwhelming. That's why inside this booklet you'll find some well chosen recommendations that will enrich your regular travel experience, should you decide to time your trip with a corresponding festival. So whether it's taking in the world's longest Christmas celebration in The Philippines, or the joining in on the world's biggest water fight in Thailand, or participating in one of the many holy Eid al-Fitr celebrations throughout Southeast Asia's Muslim nations, there are plenty of celebrations in this part of the world to enjoy and discover. The events themselves – some with ancient historical roots and some which are much more contemporary – are all joyous and colourful celebrations of life.

To find out more about soft adventure opportunities all across the 10 ASEAN nations, visit: **[www.aseantourism.travel](http://www.aseantourism.travel)**





# ●● BRUNEI



**NATIONAL DAY**

**Where:** Nationwide

**When:** February 23rd

The entire nation of Brunei participates in this joyous occasion, which many citizens prepare for months in advance. Schoolchildren, private sector representatives and civil servants work hand-in-hand rehearsing their parts in flash-card displays and other colourful public gatherings and celebrations, all culminating each year on the 23rd of February. In addition, mass prayers and Islamic scripture readings are held at mosques throughout the country.

The event itself is graced by the Royal Family which celebrates the declaration of Brunei Darussalam's independence is on January 1, 1984 which had been under the British protectorate since 1888.



However the British protection didn't end until the 23rd of February, thus the first **National Day** was celebrated on that day in **Bandar Seri Begawan**, the capital of Brunei. The 23rd of February is one special occasion where the whole nation can be heard singing the national anthem *Allah Selamatkan Sultan* (Allah Saves the Sultan) in unison during National day. This year marks the 30th Anniversary of Brunei's independence, and the celebrations that year were accordingly lavish.





## BIRTHDAY OF HIS MAJESTY THE SULTAN

### AND YANG DI-PERTUAN OF BRUNEI

**Where:** Nationwide

**When:** July 15th

One of the most important dates in Brunei's calendar, the birthday celebration of **His Majesty the Sultan** and **Yang Di-Pertuan** of Brunei Darussalam. This royal birthday takes place on July 15th and is one of the most important events and highlights in the Brunei national calendar, with activities and events held nationwide. The festivities last for two weeks, beginning with a mass prayer throughout the country, followed by visits, parades and fireworks. Thousands of people in the streets surround Taman Haji Sir Muda Omar Ali Saifuddien for the traditional parade, with many



people flocking here to express their gratitude to the king for his services. On this day His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam also delivers his *titah* (royal address), followed by an investiture ceremony held at the Istana Nurul Iman. The event is also marked with gatherings at the 4 districts where His Majesty meets with his subjects. The day ends with a banquet and the fireworks at the Istana Nurul Iman in the evening.





## PROPHET MUHAMMAD'S BIRTHDAY

**Where:** Nationwide

**When:** 12th Day of the Islamic Calendar (Rabiulawal)

This important Islamic holiday does not have a fixed date, but the celebrations of Mawlid, or the **Birthday** of the **Prophet Muhammad**, is celebrated on the 12th day of the Islamic calendar, the Rabi' al-*awwal* (Arabic) *Rabiulawal* (Malay). On this date His Majesty and the Royal family will lead a procession throughout **Bandar Seri Begawan** to mark the occasion. The Prophet Muhammad was born in the year 570 in the city of Mecca, and to celebrate his birth Muslims organize huge processions in the streets of Islamic cities. The streets, mosques and houses are decorated, and everybody joins in on the celebrations. It is common to prepare food to be distributed to the poor as a sign of charity, while children usually recite praises for Prophet Muhammad in commemoration of the anniversary of the Prophets birth. Religious functions, lectures and other activities are also held to celebrate this important occasion nationwide.



## FIRST DAY OF HIJRA

### ISLAMIC NEW YEAR

**Where:** Nationwide

**When:** 1st Day of the Islamic calendar of (Hijra)

The first day of **Hijra**, or **Islamic New Year**, coincides with the first day of Muharram, which is the first month of the Islamic calendar. The first year of the Islamic calendar started in the year of the Hijra, which was the migration of Muhammad from Mecca to Medina. During the Hijra Day observances Muslims gather in mosques for prayers of peace,

and listen to holy readings from the Quran. The day is usually spent in reflection of one's mortality and the passing of time, as well as honoring the Prophet Muhammad. In Brunei, prayers and mass *zikir* recitals are held at all mosques nationwide that include the Jame'Asr Hassanil Bolkliah Mosque, the nation's largest mosque – whose 4 terrazzo-tiled minarets are an iconic landmark of **Bandar Seri Begawan** – where the doa (supplication) for the end of the year and the beginning of the new year are read.



## HARI RAYA AIDILFITRI

**Where:** Nationwide

**When:** 1st Day of the Islamic calendar (Syawal)

**Hari Raya Aidilfitri** is a time for celebration after the end of the fasting month of *Ramadhan*. In the early part of the first day, prayers are held at every mosque nationwide. Families get together to seek forgiveness from the elders and loved ones. At this time of the year you will see the male dressed in their traditional *baju melayu* and *baju kurong* for females during the festivities. Hari Raya in Malay literally means "big day", families will be busy preparing and cooking traditional foods for the first day of the festivities, which is usually dedicated to the reunion of the immediate families. The peak of

open-house visitation among families, friends and visitors occur from the second day onwards.

The Istana Nurul Iman is open from the second to the fourth day of the festival to all citizens and international well-wishers and visitors where His Majesty the Sultan of Brunei and the other royal family members will personally greet them after a sumptuous meal at the Istana Nurul Iman. Each visitor will receive special embossed yellow boxes, filled with cake, as a token of thanks from His Majesty. The three-day event is a long-held tradition in the Sultanate, with many people traveling from all over the world to celebrate Hari Raya at the Istana Nurul Iman in this once in a lifetime experience.



## HARI RAYA HAJI

**Where:** Nationwide

**When:** 1st Day of the Islamic calendar (Syawal)

**Hari Raya Aidil Adha** or known locally known as **Hari Raya Haji** marks the end of *Haji* (the sacred pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca). Hari Raya Haji is celebrated nationwide with the symbolic korban of livestock, representing the willingness of Prophet Ibrahim to sacrifice his son, Prophet Ismail (AS) as an act of submission to Allah (SWT) command. This event demonstrated both prophets' obedience to Allah (SWT). In Brunei it is customary with the practice to slaughter livestock as part of the religious activities and to distribute the meat to the poor and needy.



# ●● CAMBODIA



**SUS'DEI CHNAM THMEI**

**CAMBODIAN NEW YEAR**

**Where:** Nationwide

**When:** April 13th to 15th

**New Year's Day** in Cambodia is a huge event, and is usually celebrated on the 13th of April, although sometimes the solar calendar denotes it as the 14th of the month. Referred to as **Sus'Dei Chnam Thmei** in the Khmer language – translated as “enter new year” – the holiday lasts for 3 days. The 1st day is called *Moha Songkran*. On that day an angel is appointed to protect the world for the year ahead, and to welcome him people clean and decorate their houses, and offer a table full of fruits, sweets, incense sticks, and flowers. The 2nd day is called *Wanabat*, or “day of giving”, and children and the elderly receive gifts, while the poor are given money or clothes. The 3rd day is called *Thangai Leurng Sak* or “rank promotion” – and in the streets and in public places people pour water on each other, and young people throw white powder at each other, much like the new year's celebrations of Thailand and Laos.



## BON OM TOUK

### CAMBODIAN WATER FESTIVAL

**Where:** Nationwide

**When:** November

Celebrated during the full moon of the Buddhist month of *Kadeuk* (usually in November), the Cambodian **Water Festival** known as **Bon Om Touk** heralds the reversal of the flow of the **Tonle Sap River**, a major focus of life for many Cambodians. Every town and province joins in on the festival but the biggest celebrations take place in **Phnom Penh**, along the Sisowath Quay. For 3 days the city's residents

celebrate day and night with boat races, concerts and other festivities. The festival also commemorates the end of the country's rainy season, and its origins date back to the 12th century. The festivities are meant to keep the river divinities happy, ensuring a bountiful harvest of rice and fish for the year to come. One of the highlights of the festival is the *Loy Pratip*, an evening fluvial parade featuring beautifully illuminated boats, and *Sampeas Preah Khe*, the salutation to the moon.



## PHCHUM BEN DAY

### ALL SOUL DAY

**Where:** Nationwide

**When:** Late September, Early October

Running for 15 days the **Phchum Ben Day Festival** is dedicated to blessing the spirits of the dead. This is one of the most culturally significant in Cambodia, culminating in celebrations on the 15th day of the tenth month in the Khmer lunar calendar, at the end of the Buddhist lent (usually late September or early to mid-October). During the celebration people bring food to the temple for the monks, and also to feed the "hungry ghosts" of their late ancestors, relatives and friends. The pagodas are usually crowded with people taking their turn to both make offerings and beseech the monks to pray for their dearly departed. Everyone participates because they don't want the spirits of their dead family members to come seeking offerings in vain. It is believed that wandering spirits will look in 7 different pagodas, and if those spirits cannot find offerings from their living relatives, they will curse them.



## THE ROYAL PLOUGHING CEREMONY

**Where:** Phnom Penh

**When:** Late May

**The Royal Ploughing Ceremony** marks the traditional beginning of the rice-growing season, and is usually held at the start of the rainy season in late May. The main event is a symbolic ploughing procession wherein the King leads the yoke and plough, and the Queen sows the seeds. After circling the field 3 times, the procession stops at a shrine where Brahmins bring sacred cows to eat from 7 silver trays containing such things as rice, corn, beans, sesame seeds, grass, water and wine. The harvest will be good if they choose cereals, rain will be abundant if they drink water, but trouble is feared if they choose alcohol. This ancient ritual – also called *Pithi Chrat Pheah Neang Korl* – takes place at the park



in front of the National Museum next to the Royal Palace in **Phnom Penh**. There is also an exhibition of agricultural products, agro-industrial products, forest products, domestic animal products and so forth that is held over 3 days.





## MEAK BOCHEA DAY



**Where:** Nationwide

**When:** Full Moon, 3rd Lunar month

The full moon of the 3rd lunar month marks the celebration of **Meak Bochea Day**, an important Buddhist holiday which usually falls in late February or early March. Historically, this day commemorates the ordainment of Buddha's first 1,250 disciples,

who spontaneously came to see him and to listen to his sermon 2,500 years ago. On this public holiday Cambodians go to local temples and perform merit making activities. In the evening these temples host candle processions called *Wien Tien*, in which devotees walk thrice around the temple – with a candle, incense sticks and lotus flower in hand. This is a colourful festivity, with the *wats* (temples) decked out in colorful buntings and flags and *aspara* dancers bearing bouquets of lotus flowers while *chhai-yam* drummers appear dressed in traditional costume. One of the best places to witness this annual event is at Wat Phnom, in the capital city of **Phnom Penh**.



# ●● INDONESIA



**CAP GOH MEH FESTIVAL**

**Where:** Singkawang, West Kalimantan

**When:** 15th day, Lunar New Year

While you may not immediately think of Indonesia when it comes to **Chinese New Year** celebrations, the 15th day of the Lunar New Year – usually in mid-February – is heartily celebrated in areas of Indonesia with large ethnic Chinese populations (where it is known as “*Cap Go Meh*”). The most fascinating festival takes place in the exotic town of **Singkawang**, located 145 km north of Pontianak, in West Kalimantan. Here the festivities are centered around the Kridasana Stadium where visitors can witness performances on special stages, starting on the eve of the **Chinese New Year** and culminating with the Cap Go Meh finale. The peak of the festival is the parade of the ancient art of *Tatung*, intended to repel misfortunes for the rest of the year. During these rituals participants enter into a trance and perform many unbelievable stunts, such as stepping on swords or sticking steel wires or nails into their cheeks, and all without being wounded or scarred.





## JAVA JAZZ FESTIVAL

**Where:** Jakarta International Exhibition Center  
**When:** Late February / Early March

This 4-day musical event, which takes over the city of **Jakarta** sometime in late February and/or early March, has become one of the most prestigious jazz gatherings in Southeast Asia. The first **Java Jazz Festival** was staged in 2005 but over time the event has grown to such a magnitude that in 2010 it was acknowledged as the biggest jazz festival in the world, and in 2013 it recorded the highest number of audience in attendance, attracting over 100,000 fans. Using the Jakarta International Exhibition Center in Kemayoran as its primary venue, this eclectic showcase of music and musicians has in the past brought to its stages such acclaimed international stars as Natalie Cole, Jamie Cullum, Roy Ayers, India Arie, Lonnie Liston Smith, Lisa Stansfield, Joss Stone, and the Earth Wind and Fire Experience. However talented Indonesian musicians are not left out of the picture and each year a huge number are invited to perform. For exact dates and ticket information, visit [www.javajazzfestival.com](http://www.javajazzfestival.com).



## BALI ARTS FESTIVAL

**Where:** Bali Art Center, Denpasar  
**When:** mid-June to mid-July

Locally known as **Pesta Kesenian Bali**, the **Bali Arts Festival**, which takes place from every second Saturday of June to the second Saturday of July, is a yearly celebration of the arts in all its forms – from music and dance, to art, photography, cuisine and literature. The month-long event gathers locals and international visitors together for a series of celebratory festivities, in a range of locations, primarily centered around the Bali Art Center in **Denpasar**. The

festival begins with a parade of performers from all districts in Bali, as well as other Indonesian provinces, and each year the festival carries with it a "theme" which is illustrated in the various processions, exhibitions, competitions, seminars, and so forth. Enjoy daily performances and exhibitions, and discover more about the unique heritage of this fascinating island paradise. For more detailed information, visit [www.baliartsfestival.com](http://www.baliartsfestival.com).





## VESAK FESTIVAL

**Where:** Borobudur, Central Java

**When:** Full Moon in May

The magnificent temple of Borobudur is worth visiting anytime of year, but in the month of May, during the *purnama sidhi*, or full moon, this ancient landmark hosts the holy **Vesak Festival**, attracting thousands of Buddhist pilgrims and other travelers. Located in an elevated area between two twin volcanoes, the temple itself dates back to the 9th century and is one of the most visited sites in all of Indonesia. The Vesak ceremony commemorates the 3 most important events in the life of the Buddha Siddharta Gautama – namely his birth, his enlightenment, and his passing – and on Vesak day, the monks and the congregation embark on the journey up to Borobudur Temple, carrying the sacred torch and the holy water. The first appearance of the full moon marks the pinnacle of the ceremony, and after more evening rituals thousands of *Puja* lanterns are released into the sky, symbolizing enlightenment for the entire universe. This festival is a beautiful display of spirituality, faith, and the true essence of Buddhism.



## TOMOHON FLOWER FESTIVAL

**Where:** Tomohon, North Sulawesi

**When:** August 8th to 12th

The hill town of **Tomohon**, in North Sulawesi, comes into full bloom every other August with displays of flowers in every colour, shape, and size. The bi-annual **Tomohon International Flower Festival**, which began in 2008, attracts representatives both local and international, with the aim to promote flowers as the city's icon as well as improving the local economy through tourism. Highlights at previous festivals have included the **Tournament of Flowers**, featuring a multitude of decorated floats, the **Flower Queen Beauty Pageant**, featuring contestants who share an enthusiasm for flowers, the Archipelago Art and Cultural Performance, which showcases cultural offerings from all over the Indonesian archipelago, and the popular Tourism, Trade, Investment, and Floriculture Expo. In addition, side events such as kite flying exhibitions, marching band competitions, choral competitions, fine arts exhibitions, a photography competition, and a mouth-watering culinary festival, all serve to make this a diverse and fascinating cultural event.





# ●● LAO PDR



## BOUN PI MAI LAO

### LAO NEW YEAR WATER FESTIVAL

**Where:** Luang Prabang

**When:** April 14th to 16th

The Lao New Year takes place in April, in the middle of the hot summer season, with celebrations lasting 3 days. During this time the Lao people believe that the old spirit of *Songkran* leaves this plane, making way for a new one. Water plays a big part in the festivities, as the faithful bathe Buddha images at local temples and receive blessings. People also get very wet during this festival, and foreign travelers are not exempt. Expect to be soaked by passing teenagers splashing water from buckets, hoses, or high-pressure water guns. In the city of **Luang Prabang** witness the nation's biggest **Boun Pi Mai Lao** parade, featuring dancers and drummers in traditional costume, Hmong and Khmu ethnic tribes, masked actors portraying mythic characters and more.



## BOUN THAT LUANG

### THAT LUANG STUPA FESTIVAL

**Where:** Vientiane

**When:** Full moon, 12th Lunar month

Vientiane's **Golden Stupa**, or *Pha That Luang*, is both the national symbol and the most important religious monument in Laos. The most important Buddhist festival is the Boun That Luang festival, held over 3 days during the full moon of the 12th lunar month – usually November, but sometimes October.

The festival starts with a colourful candlelight *Phasat* (wax castle) procession that gets underway on the eve of the festival at Wat Simeuang. The procession continues the next afternoon from Wat Simeuang to

That Luang. People wearing their best clothes carry flowers, candles, incense and wax castles decorated by flowers and bank notes. There is also a parade of men and women dressed in various Lao ethnic costumes who dance and play traditional music and songs as they approach the stupa. The following morning a huge crowd assembles at dawn to play homage to the stupa and to give alms to hundreds of monks. The festival draws to close under a full moon, when people from all over gather for a final candlelight procession. There are also firework displays to mark the end of the celebration.



## BOUN XANG

**Where:** Sayaboury

**When:** February 17th to 19th

### SAYABOURY ELEPHANT FESTIVAL

As a living icon with important symbolic connotations and historical associations in Laos, the elephant is an animal dear to the hearts of the Lao people. The annual **Elephant Festival** in **Sayaboury** is a celebration of culture and traditional ties between Lao communities and the elephant, and it also focuses attention on the status of this animal as an endangered species. The festival is a free, all-ages event with activities including a majestic elephant procession with up to 100 elephants, a traditional elephant *Baci* ceremony, fruit and flower offerings, blessings from monks, mahout and elephant shows, live performances from Lao and foreign artists, and night markets. At the outdoor elephant museum visitors will have the opportunity to see documentary films on a large outdoor screen, enjoy live performance on the main stage, and go for elephant rides in the neighbouring forest.

## BOUN BANG FAI

### ROCKET FESTIVAL

**Where:** Nationwide

**When:** Late May

During this festival villages prepare bamboo rockets for a competition in which the village able to send its rocket highest up in the sky, wins. This rocket competition is held in order to demonstrate appreciation to Payathene, the deity who provides people with the rains necessary for agricultural crops. This festival also consists of a variety of other activities, including a traditional dance performed in a circle. In addition, men will wear traditional Lao women's clothes and cosmetics, people will tie the clothes on each other, and in the afternoon mock-up elephant and horse pantomime puppets are taken around the host village. In the Vientiane region, **Boun**



**Bang Fai** is organized in the outskirts of the city, for safety reasons, with the most famous events being those held in the surrounding villages of Nason, Natham, Thongmang, Kern and Pakhanhoung.



## BOUN VAT PHOU CHAMPASAK

### VAT PHOU TEMPLE FESTIVAL

**Where:** Champasak

**When:** Full Moon, 3rd Lunar month

This is the largest festival in **Champasak** province and one of the largest in the entire country. This festival attracts thousands of people each year who gather for prayer ceremonies and to enjoy the festivities at

the base of Vat Phou, an enormous ancient temple complex dates back to the 5th century. On the 3rd and final day of the festival, a candlelit procession and the lighting of 4,000 lamps takes place in the early evening.



## BOUN SUANG HEUA

### BOAT RACING FESTIVAL

**Where:** Luang Prabang / Vientiane

**When:** August – October

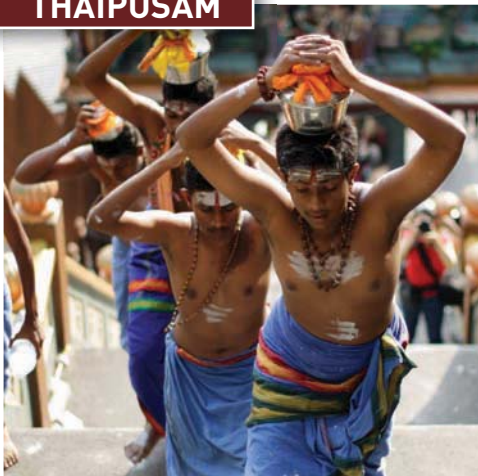
In Luang Prabang the Boat Racing Festival known as **Boun Suang Heua** is held on Khao Padapdin, the Day of the Commemoration of the Dead (in August), while in Vientiane it is held on the day after the End of Buddhist Lent (usually mid-October). Both are important social and sporting events, witnessed by huge crowds, and at their core these festivals pay homage to water divinities and the *Nagas*, who are

protectors of the country. On the day of the race big crowds gather along the banks of the Mekong River to watch and cheer on the boats. Next to the stand reserved for officials a traditional orchestra plays to accompany each race, and accelerate the tempo as the boats close in on the finish line, dramatically adding to the momentum. These boats can hold approximately fifty paddlers, and the morning is devoted to women's crews while the afternoon is for the men's crews. After the final race, all the boats participate in a spectacular competition and show.



# ●●MALAYSIA

## THAIPUSAM



**Where:** Nationwide

**When:** January/February

This spectacular festival falls in late January or early February. **Thaipusam** commemorates the occasion when Parvati, a Hindu goddess, gave Lord Murugan a *Vel* or divine spear so that he could vanquish the evil demon Soorapadman. On the eve of Thaipusam, a statue of Lord Murugan is taken on a procession on a chariot. The next day, devotees will carry *kavadis*, a metal or wooden arch with elaborate decorations, placed on their bodies, either as penance or to show devotion, or just to offer thanksgiving for answered prayers. These devotees march through Hindu temples amidst chanting and drumming, with hooks and spikes of the kavadi extending to various parts of their bodies. Thaipusam is celebrated on a big scale in Selangor, Penang, Negeri Sembilan, Johor and Perak.



## CHINESE NEW YEAR

**Where:** Nationwide

**When:** 1st day, 1st month, Chinese calendar

Celebrated over a period of 15 days, beginning from the first day of the Chinese lunar calendar, **Chinese New Year** is the most important festival for the global Chinese community. Preceded by the all-important family reunion dinner the night before, the new year is celebrated with cakes and sweetmeats, the giving of *ang paws* (red packets filled with cash), and traditional lion dances and fireworks. *Chap Goh Mei*, or the 15th night of the celebrations, marks the end of the festival. On this night, young, unmarried women inscribe messages on oranges and throw them into lakes or ponds in the hopes of attracting a good husband.



## TADAU KAAMATAN



**Where:** Sabah

**When:** May 30th to 31st

Held on 30th and 31st May, this is a joyous occasion celebrated by the Kadazandusun community in Sabah, as thanksgiving for a bountiful harvest. Festivities include traditional sports such as buffalo race, *tapai* or rice wine competition, and *Unduk Ngadau* (a beauty pageant). Other interesting activities include cultural dance and rituals culminating in the thanksgiving ceremony performed by the *Bobohizan* or high priestess.



## GAWAI DAYAK FESTIVAL

**Where:** Sarawak

**When:** June 1st

The **Gawai Dayak festival** is celebrated yearly on 1 June in Sarawak on the island of Borneo. *Gawai* means ritual or festival while *Dayak* is a collective name for the tribes of Iban, Bidayuh, Kayan, Kenyah, Kelabit, Murut, and many more. It marks the end of the *padi*-planting season and the start of the new planting season. To prepare for the festival, Dayaks clean their homes and the graves of their ancestors. During the festival, the Dayaks are attired in their finest costumes. *Tuak* (rice wine) is served to guests and dancing is part of the merrymaking. Livestock is sacrificed for a good harvest and war dances, cockfights and blowpipe events will also take place.



## HARI RAYA PUASA

(EID AL-FITR)

**Where:** Nationwide

**When:** End of Ramadan

**Hari Raya Aidilfitri**, or **Hari Raya Puasa**, marks the end of Ramadan – the fasting month – and the first of *Syawal*, the tenth month of the Muslim calendar. It is customary for Muslims during this period to ask for forgiveness from family and friends. On the day of *Aidilfitri*, the faithful usher in the day with morning prayers, followed by visits to the graves of the departed. Houses are cleaned, new clothes are worn, and special decorations are put up. Traditional Malay food, including *rendang*, *ketupat*, and an assortment of cookies, are served at open houses where friends and relatives come to visit. Children are dressed in brand new clothing, and enjoy receiving *duit raya*, or money filled packets from the adults.





## HARI MERDEKA

MALAYSIA'S INDEPENDENCE DAY

**Where:** Nationwide

**When:** August 31

A carnival-like atmosphere pervades on the eve of Malaysia's **Independence Day** celebration, as a night of mesmerizing dances, dazzling fireworks displays, and stunning performances by local artists all culminate to the Hari Merdeka countdown. At the stroke of midnight, the *Jalur Gemilang* (Malaysian flag) is raised, amidst the hearty shouts of "*merdeka*", which means "independence" in Malay.



# ●● MYANMAR



## SHIN PYU CEREMONY

**Where:** Nationwide

**When:** Various Times

The **Shin Pyu** or **Novitiation Ceremony**, where young male Buddhists become novice monks, dates back to the time of the Buddha, some 2,500 years ago, when the Buddha granted His son the heritage of becoming a novice. Nowadays the occasion is associated with much fanfare, and charity feasts are held for invited guests and relatives. There is not restriction on when a *shin pyu* ceremony may be held, but the months of February, March and April are the most popular. The procession begins as the boys ride the caparisoned (decorated) horses – shaded with gilded umbrellas and accompanied by parents, family members and others – to a nat or spirit home where prayers and devotions are held. Later in the day the boys are novitiated – including having their heads shaven – after which the fresh novices must stay in the monastery for at least 7 days, under the care of the residing monks. Families earn great merit when a son dons the robe of the monk, even if he does not remain in the order long enough to take his ordained vows.



## PHAUNG DAW OO PAGODA FESTIVAL

**Where:** Inle Lake

**When:** September / October

Set in and around the stilted villages of **Inle Lake**, the **Phaung Daw Oo Pagoda Festival** is one of the largest Buddhist festivals in Myanmar, held from the 1st day of the waxing moon to the 3rd day after the full moon of *Thadingyut* (usually in September or October). The celebrations run for about 20 days, during which 4 sacred Buddha images are placed on a decorated royal barge and taken around the lake, stopping at villages so that people can pay homage. The Phaung Daw Oo Pagoda itself an important religious site in this region, and the festival is presented each year with great magnificence and pageantry. Watching the traditional leg-rowers as they sail the holy Buddha images around the lake is also an added attraction. During the festival, each village greets the 4 images with fanfare and celebrates every moment of the one-night stopover. Festivities may include rowing competitions, Shan dances and martial arts displays.

## KYAUKSE DANCING ELEPHANT FESTIVAL

**Where:** Kyaukse (near Mandalay)

**When:** Full Moon, 7th Lunar month

Visitors to Myanmar looking for something very out of the ordinary should attend the **Dancing Elephant Festival** held in **Kyaukse**, near Mandalay. However these marvelous performances are not the work of actual elephants, but teams of 2 men each in huge elephant costumes – made from bamboo and paper – who dance together in rhythm to the accompaniment of *dobat* and drums. These elephant dancers circle 3 times at the foot of the hill to pay

homage to the Shwe Tha Lyaung Pagoda. The festival is held at the end of Buddhist Lent, which coincides with the full moon of the 7th lunar month (usually October), and the colourful elephant costumes can take months to make – decorated in glitter, gold foil, satin, ribbons, and glass gems. The festival lasts all day and includes both a parade and a dance competition, and the participants are judged on their dancing, their costume construction, and the music and singing involved.



## TAZAUNGDINE & THADINGYUT

### FESTIVALS OF LIGHTS

**Where:** Nationwide

**When:** 7th and 8th Lunar months

Myanmar enjoys 2 back-to-back light festivals, the first of which is the **Thadingyut Festival**, held on the full moon day of the 7th lunar month (known as *Thadingyut*). This 3-day festival coincides with the end of Buddhist lent, and festivities include *Zat Pwes* (musical plays), free movie and stage shows, and releasing fire balloons. During the days Buddhists go to pagodas and monasteries to pay respect to the monks and offer food, while young people pay respect to parents, teachers and elderly relatives. One month later the Tazaungdine Festival of Lights is celebrated, held on the full moon day of the 8th month of the lunar calendar (*Tazaungmon*). This is a national holiday in Myanmar, and marks the end of the rainy season. In Shan State, particularly in **Taunggyi**, hot air balloons lit with candles are released to celebrate the full moon day, while alms giving and charity are undertaken as a means of merit-making.





**KACHIN MANAW FESTIVAL**

**Where:** Kachine State

**When:** January

At some point in early January, during the 7 days of the colourful **Kachin Manaw Festival**, the local Kachin tribes – such as the *Kharku*, *Thaisan*, *Lacheik*, *Rawang*, *Thaikhamt* and *Lisu* – adorn themselves with their best traditional costumes and dance around *Manaw* poles that have been erected at the center of the festival ground are decorated with folk-art. The festival focuses on paying gratitude to ancestral spirits, and praying for future prosperity. It's also the celebration of the New Year, of victory in battles, and a reunion of the tribes. The Manaw feast meanwhile serves dishes that include buffalo meat, pork or wild boar, beef, chicken, rice and copious pots of rice wine. This festival is held in **Myitkyina** and **Putao**, in the Kachine State, and to some onlookers the erected Manaw poles appear quite similar to the totem poles of North American Indians. Some Manaw festivals in the past have attracted more than 300,000 visitors and participants.





# ●● THE PHILIPPINES



**PASKO**

**CHRISTMAS IN THE PHILIPPINES**

**Where:** Nationwide

**When:** December 16th to January 6th

Filipinos take pride every year in celebrating the world's longest **Christmas** season, which they call "*Pasko*", derived from the Spanish word *pascua*. The holiday season concludes on the Feast of the Epiphany, or Three Kings, which usually falls around January 6, but it begins on December 16 with the start of 9 days of dawn masses called *Simbang Gabi* (night worship). During the entire season, Christmas parties are held everywhere – in schools, offices and social organizations – and weeks before Christmas, carolers – mostly children – go from house to house singing Christmas songs. On Christmas Eve families gather to eat a midnight feast called *Noche Buena*, exchange gifts, and have fun all night long into the next day. On Christmas Day, families and children hear mass and visit their uncles, aunts, godmothers and godfathers.





## SINULOG FESTIVAL

**Where:** Cebu City, Cebu  
**When:** 3rd Sunday in January

The **Sinulog Festival** is an annual cultural and religious event held on the 3rd Sunday of January in Cebu City. The festival commemorates the Filipino people's pagan origins and their subsequent acceptance of, and conversion to, Christianity (Roman Catholicism). One of the main highlights of the festival is the grand street parade which lasts for 9 to 12 hours – practically the entire day – with participants coming from the different towns and cities of Cebu as well as from Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao, virtually all across the Philippines. The Sinulog dancers are dressed in bright coloured costumes and move gracefully to the rhythm of drums, trumpets and native gongs. The word “sinulog” is derived from the Cebuano word meaning



“like the flowing water or current” and the dancers usually dance forward and backwards in conjunction with the timing of the drum. Smaller versions of the festival are held in other various parts of the province, and the celebrations also serve to honor the Santo Niño.

There are also similar festivals happening annually in other parts of the Visayas group of islands in the month of January, including the **Dinagyang Festival** in Iloilo City, and the **Ati-Atihan Festival** in Aklan Province.





## KADAYAWAN FESTIVAL

**Where:** Davao City

**When:** 3rd week of August

The **Kadayawan Festival** is an annual celebration in the **City of Davao** during the 3rd week of August. It explores the past, present and future of Davaoeños, Mindanaoans, and Filipinos in general. It mainly features the multicolored mix of Davao and Mindanao's indigenous communities, as well as the migrant settlers whose identities make up the rich cultural heritage of this island. The Kadayawan is primarily a celebration of thanksgiving for the gifts of nature, the wealth of culture, the bounties of the harvest, and the serenity of living. The festival also pays tribute to Davao's artistic, cultural and historical heritage. Exciting events include the search for the *Hiyas sa Kadayawan*, a young woman chosen during the festival who epitomizes the beauty and richness of Mindanao's fashion and floral arts. Other festival highlights include a river festival, an indigenous music exhibition, dance competitions, a trade fair, food and music parties, street dancing and a floral float parade.





## INTERNATIONAL BAMBOO ORGAN FESTIVAL

**Where:** St. Joseph Parish Church, Las Piñas, Metro Manila

**When:** February

The annual **International Bamboo Organ Festival** began in 1976, one year after the inaugural post-restoration concert on the world's only Bamboo Organ – an instrument that is almost 200 years old and crafted almost entirely of bamboo. This 10-day musical and cultural event features brilliant performances from homegrown talents such as the Las Piñas Boys Choir, as well as music professor **Armando Salarza**, a prominent figure in the festival as recitalist, ensemble player, harpsichordist, and conductor.

The year 2015 marks the 40th Anniversary of the landmark 1975 concert, and celebrations get underway on February 19th at a gala concert. For exact dates and details visit: [www.bambooorgan.org/ibof.html](http://www.bambooorgan.org/ibof.html)

## PANAGBENGA FESTIVAL



**Where:** Baguio City, Luzon

**When:** February

Celebrated annually since 1995, the **Panabenga Festival** is a showcase for floral floats and native dances such as the *Cañao*, wherein the man leads the woman in a circle, accompanied by the beat of sticks and gongs and shouts from the audience. The month-long event, also known as the Baguio Flower Festival, pays homage to the beautiful flowers the city is famous for and also serves as a celebration of Baguio's re-establishment in the wake of the disastrous 1990 earthquake. *Panabenga* is a term for 'season of blooming' and in addition to the floral



float parades there is also a street dancing parade, a Mr. and Ms. Baguio Flower Festival, a skateboard competition, fun runs, and plenty more.





# ●●SINGAPORE



**CHINESE NEW YEAR**

Image © Kreta Ayer – Kim Seng  
Citizen's Consultative Committee

**Where:** Chinatown & Nationwide

**When:** 1st day of the 1st month, Chinese calendar

Soak up the festive atmosphere of **Chinese New Year** during the 2-week-long celebrations held in Singapore's Chinatown. Observed by Singaporeans from all walks of life, the festival begins on the 1st day of the 1st month in the Chinese calendar and ends on the 15th day. At the festive street bazaars you can find over 500 shop stalls featuring goodies such as waxed duck, barbecued sweet meats, cookies, fresh flowers, Chinese calligraphy prints, opera masks, and traditional New Year decorations. Nightly cultural performances take place at Kreta Ayer Square, and street performances include lion dances, dragon parades and blazing pyrotechnics displays. The centerpiece of the festivities is the **Chingay Parade**, a grand carnival with dazzling floats, spectacles and dances that is held on the grounds of the Formula One Pit Building at the Marina waterfront. Another popular event is the **Huayi Festival**, at The Esplanade, which showcases traditional and contemporary Chinese arts in a variety of genres like theatre, opera, music and art.





## HARI RAYA PUASA

**Where:** Arab Quarter

**When:** 10th month, Islamic calendar

**Hari Raya Aidilfitri** is recognized as a public holiday, falling on the 1st day of *Syawal*, the 10th month of the Islamic lunar calendar (the exact date varies each year). In Singapore, the first 3 days of the holiday are celebrated on a grand scale in the city's Arab Quarter. The streets of Geylang Serai and Kampong Glam – home to the grand Sultan Mosque – come alive with performances and street bazaars. Both districts attract Singaporeans of all races, and everyone is welcome to take part in the celebrations. The festival rewards the self-restraint shown during Ramadan, and symbolizes purification and renewal. From the 20th day of Ramadan, until the end of the festival,



oil lamps at homes and mosques are kept lit. On Hari Raya Aidilfitri, everyone puts on new clothes, houses are thoroughly cleaned and decorated, and people celebrate in the evening with friends and families, enjoying delicious treats such as cakes, sweets and biscuits.



Image © Kreta Ayer – Kim Seng  
Citizen's Consultative Committee



Image © Kreta Ayer – Kim Seng  
Citizen's Consultative Committee



## MID AUTUMN FESTIVAL

**Where:** Chinatown

**When:** August/September

The **Mid-Autumn Festival** is also known as the Mooncake or Lantern Festival because of the festivities that surround the occasion. According to Chinese legend, this festival was to commemorate the selfless act of Chang'e, the wife of a merciless ruler in China who drank the elixir of immortality to put an end to her husband's evil deeds. Traditionally this festival is spent with family members and friends, gathering together to indulge in tasty mooncakes – round pastries that contain a rich thick filling, usually made from red bean or lotus seed paste, surrounded by a thin fragrant crust – and taking in beautiful views of the moon, when it is at its brightest and fullest. The festival falls on the 15th day of the 8th moon, which usually occurs in August or September. During this period, Chinatown and its nearby precincts are spectacularly adorned with thousands of beautiful lanterns of varying shapes, sizes and colours, delighting both locals and visitors alike. Visitors are also treated to street bazaars, dragon dance performances, cultural exhibitions and a myriad of fantastic photographic opportunities. This fun-filled festival is the ideal way to soak up the Chinese culture and sample some delicious Chinese delicacies.





## DEEPAVALI

**Where:** Little India

**When:** 15th day of Kartika, Hindu calendar

The public holiday known as **Deepavali** is considered the most important festival in Hinduism. In Singapore, it is also known as the 'Festival of Lights' and falls on the 15th day of *Kartika* in the Hindu calendar, usually in October or November. It is the celebration of good over evil, and light overcoming darkness. During this time, the streets of Little India are transformed into stunning festive themes using lights and colourful décor. Serangoon Road is the epicenter of activity, but there is lots to be seen on neighbouring Hastings Road, Kerbau Road and Campbell Lane as well. This entire precinct comes alive in an explosion of dazzling street decorations and lively fireworks, and everywhere you look you will find stalls offering colourful festive items, Indian ethnic wear, intricate jewellery, costumes, arts and crafts, decorations, music, spices, traditional sweet meats, festive cookies and more. One traditional way to celebrate is to have your hands painted with henna art.





CHRISTMAS

**Where:** Nationwide  
**When:** December 25th

As a melting pot of different religions and cultures, with people from every country residing in this metropolitan city-state, it is not surprising that **Christmas** has become one of the key celebrations in Singapore. And although Christians constitute almost 20% of the population, this holiday is also celebrated by Singaporeans of different religions and cultures. During Christmas, the entire stretch of Orchard Road is adorned with festive lights and beautiful



decorations of all sorts that evoke the holiday spirit and bathe the entire area in a sea of illumination. A trip to Singapore would be incomplete without experiencing this enchanting 'Christmas Light-up' while traipsing through the shopping haven along Orchard Road. Another area to soak in the Christmas atmosphere is at the Marina Bay promenade where you can enjoy a relaxing meal and drink while being mesmerized by the delightful decorations along the waterfront.





# ●● THAILAND

## SONGKRAN

### NEW YEAR'S WATER FESTIVAL



Image courtesy of Tourism Authority of Thailand, used with permission

**Where:** Nationwide

**When:** April 13th to 15th

Of all the festivals in Thailand the **Songkran Festival** is definitely the rowdiest. Astrologically it is a celebration of the vernal equinox, and from the 13th to the 15th of April the entire nation goes into party mode and everyone joins in. This water festival welcomes the new year, and the tradition of throwing water symbolizes the washing away of the bad from the previous year. However in recent decades this water dousing has escalated to new heights, and tourists and locals alike can expect to be soaked by everyone they encounter – whether it's a splash from a bucket, a blast from a hose, or a squirt from a high-pressure water gun. There is also a serious side to Songkran, as families gather together and the faithful bathe Buddha images and ask for blessings, but the fun side is hard to ignore. In **Bangkok** head to Khao San Rd or the city's Silom Rd district for the craziest water fights, and in **Chiang Mai** expect the festivities to begin a day early and go on a day or two later.

*For more information on Songkran activities across Thailand next year please visit [www.tatnews.org](http://www.tatnews.org)*



Image courtesy of Tourism Authority of Thailand, used with permission

## PHI TA KHON

**Where:** Loei Province

**When:** Usually in July

**Phi Ta Khon** is the common name for a variety of festivities held in **Dan Sai, Loei** province (in Thailand's northeastern Isaan region), which take place during the first week after the 6th full moon of the year, usually in July. A masked procession, which takes place on the 1st day of this 3-day Buddhist merit-making holiday – also referred to as the 'Ghost Festival' – is called *Boon Prawat* and features a long, colourful parade of young men who dance and strike poses while wearing huge, somewhat frightening, masks made from carved coconut-tree trunks, topped with wicker work and sticky-rice steamers. As they parade they carry sacred Buddha images, but they also cheerfully taunt and tease the crowds



of onlookers by waving oversized carved wooden phallus amulets. On the second day of the festival the villagers gather at the temple of Wat Ponchai to listen to the 13 sermons of Prince Vessandorn being recited by local monks.

*For more tourist information on Loei province please visit [www.tourismthailand.org/Loei](http://www.tourismthailand.org/Loei)*





## LOI KRATHONG FESTIVAL

**Where:** Nationwide

**When:** November Full Moon

The **Loi** (or Loy) **Krathong Festival** is celebrated nationwide as the full moon of the 12th lunar month – usually in November – lights up the night sky. The term *krathong* refers to a lotus-shaped receptacle that can float on the water and the ritual is very simple, in that you buy (or build) a *krathong*, make a wish, light the candle, and then let the whole thing be carried away down the river. The candle is the main component of this tiny vessel, and the flame signifies longevity, fulfillment of wishes and release from sins. Millions of people follow this ritual, along Thailand's numerous rivers and canals, thus transforming the kingdom's waterways into an amazing network of tiny lights. The Chao Phraya River in Bangkok is a favourite spot this time of year, but the province of Sukothai, where the ritual first began, is also famous for its Loi Krathong Festival and in Chiang Mai the festival coincides with Yi Peng, a beautiful lantern festival.

## CANDLE FESTIVAL

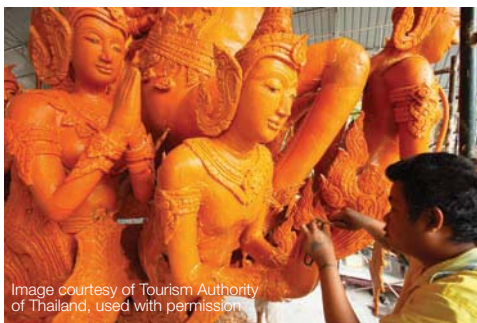


Image courtesy of Tourism Authority of Thailand, used with permission

**Where:** Ubon Ratchathani  
**When:** July Full Moon

The **Ubon Ratchathani Candle Festival** is by far the most elaborate of the traditional candle procession ceremonies in Thailand that mark *Asanha Bucha* day, the start of the Buddhist Lent. Held in Ubon Ratchathani, in the country's northeastern Isaan region, this festival is a major event for both residents and tourists. Usually taking place in July, this event sees competitors unveiling their breathtakingly elaborate wax sculptures – each representing a local temple, district or other institution – which are then paraded through the town. This procession of candle floats from the various temples, each with a beautiful lady representing an angel, moves from the front of Wat Si Ubon Rattanaram and along the road to Thung Si Muang, a park in the middle of the city, where they are decorated and then exhibited in the evening. These candles are, of course, never burned, but during the evening there are small processions with lighted candles at several temples.

*For more information, contact:*  
*TAT Ubon Ratchathani Office*  
*Tel: +66 (0)4 524 3770, +66 (0)4 525 0714*  
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*[www.tourismthailand.org/ubonratchathani](http://www.tourismthailand.org/ubonratchathani)*



Image courtesy of Tourism Authority of Thailand, used with permission

## WAI KRU MUAY THAI

**Where:** Ayutthaya  
**When:** mid-March

During the month of March, hundreds of Muay Thai boxers from around the world return to the ancient capital of Ayutthaya to pay respect to their teachers, and/or pay homage to the legendary Muay Thai folk hero Nai Khanom Tom. The annual **World Wai Kru Muay Thai Ceremony** celebrates the artistry of Thailand's world-famous martial art, and traditionally this annual gathering was meant to honour the teachers as well as consecrate a blessing on the fighters themselves – a shield against nervousness and fear – and to showcase the origin of individual boxers, as different camps had their own distinct styles. During the modern version of this festival, held in **Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya** historic park, visitors can expect to see Muay Thai demonstrations and tournaments, as well as exhibitions of Thai arts, handicrafts, ancient weapons and more.

*For more information, contact: TAT Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Office*  
*Tel: +66 (0)3 524 6076 – 7*  
*Facebook: TAT Ayutthaya*



# ●● VIET NAM



## KATE FESTIVAL

### FIRST FULL MOON FESTIVAL

**Where:** Ninh Thuan Province

**When:** Late September, Early October

The annual **Kate Festival**, celebrated by Viet Nam's Cham people, is one of the nation's most unique annual events. The festival itself revolves around 3 ancient structures – the Po Inu Nagar Temple, the Po Klong Garai Tower, and the Po Rome Tower – where cultural valuables of Cham culture are stored, including costumes, musical instruments, and copies of hymns praising kings who made great service to

the Champa Kingdom and Cham people. The festival takes place from the 30th day of the 6th month to 2nd day of the 7th month, as stipulated in the Cham solar calendar, which usually translates to the end of September and/or the beginning of October. To witness this celebration, head to **Ninh Thuan Province**, and enjoy traditional arts performances of Cham people, such as the Apsara dance, the *Ginang* and *Paranung* drum-beat, and the *Saranai* trump. In most cases the festival lasts for 3 days and the main festival falls on the 2nd day.

## ELEPHANT RACE FESTIVAL

**Where:** Don Village, Dak Lak Province

**When:** March of Every Even Year

The **Elephant Race Festival** takes place in springtime, normally in the 3rd lunar month, although it is only held during even numbered years. In preparation for the festivities people take their elephants to places where they can eat their fill, and the animals are freed from any hard work, in order to preserve their strength. On the festival day, elephants from different villages gather at **Don Village** (Buon Don District, Dak Lak Province), and visitors to the festival wear colourful costumes. The racing ground is 500m long, and wide enough for 10 elephants to stand simultaneously, and once the race is run the



winning elephant is given a laurel wreath. After the race the elephants also participate in the swim competition across the Serepok River, as well as in tug-of-wars, throwing balls, and playing football. The race reflects the martial spirit of the M'Nong people, an ethnic group famous for their bravery in wild elephant hunting.



## HUNG TEMPLE FESTIVAL

**Where:** Phu Tho Province

**When:** 8th – 11th day, 3rd Lunar month

The annual **Hung Temple Festival** pays tribute to King Hung, the first king of Viet Nam. The occasion runs from the 8th to the 11th day of the 3rd lunar month, and attracts visitors from all over the country who come to show their love and pride of their homeland and ancestral land. On the main festival day – the 10th – there is a drum performance followed by a solemn national ceremony with an incense-offering liturgy. *Banh chung* (square sticky rice cake) and *banh giay* (round sticky rice cake) are offered, both to honour the merit of the king, who taught people to plant rice, and to remind people of Lang Lieu who invented the cakes. The procession then



advances to *Den Thuong* (the Upper Temple) on **Nghia Linh Mountain**. At the same time, sacrifice-offering ceremonies are also celebrated at Hung Temples in Ho Chi Minh City, Nha Trang and other provinces.





## TẾT NGUYÊN ĐÁN



**Where:** Nationwide

**When:** Late January, Early February

Vietnamese New Year is known simply as **Tet**, and is the most important celebration of the year. The celebration lasts for 3 days and is an occasion for pilgrimages and family reunions, as well as a time for paying respect to both one's ancestors and one's grandparents. It is an occasion when everyone sends each other best wishes for a new year, stops thinking about unhappy things, and says good things about each other. There are various customs practiced during Tet, including visiting the homes of others on the first day of the new year, giving lucky money to young children and old people, and expressing hopes for longevity to the elderly, or anyone opening rice paddies or opening a shop. This holiday also celebrates the arrival of spring based on the Vietnamese variation of the Chinese lunar calendar, and thus the holiday falls in the month of January or February, on the same day as Chinese New Year.



## TẾT TRUNG THU

### MID-AUTUMN FESTIVAL

**Where:** Nationwide

**When:** Full Moon, 8th Lunar month

The Mid-Autumn Festival of **Tết Trung Thu**, one of the most popular festivals in Viet Nam, is held on the 15th day of the 8th lunar month – usually in September or early October – coinciding with the full moon. On this day the moon is at its brightest and roundest, and as a result the festival is also known as *Tet Trong Trang* (moon looking festival) for the children. During the festivities costumed children parade along the streets while singing and carrying colorful lanterns, often in the shape of fish, stars, or butterflies. Traditional dances are also performed, including the dragon dance and the flower dance. It is also customary at this time to give *Banh Trung Thu*, or boxes of “mooncakes”, which are traditional pastry sweets filled with lotus seeds, ground beans and orange peels, and contain a bright yoke in the center which represents the moon.





## ●● TOURIST INFORMATION CONTACTS

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### INDONESIA

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### LAO PDR

Department of Tourism Marketing, Ministry  
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[www.tourismmalaysia.gov.my](http://www.tourismmalaysia.gov.my)





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Union Of Myanmar.  
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[www.myanmar-tourism.org](http://www.myanmar-tourism.org)



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