

Ok Phansa

End of the Rains Retreat (October-November)



After three months restricted to their temples, learning dharma and practicing meditation, the Buddhist monks once again return to their social duties. At the end of Buddhist Lent, it's also time for another big celebration, referred to as 'Ok Phansa.' Thai Buddhists celebrate this occasion by offering food and lavish gifts to monks.

The legend of Ok Phansa has it that the Lord Buddha retreated to heaven to deliver a sermon to his mother who had died seven days after his birth. After staying there for three months, the Lord Buddha completed his mission and returned to earth. People welcomed his return with great joy and excitement. Even the gods and goddesses joined in the ceremonies welcoming the Lord Buddha.

Descending from heaven on the triple stairways of gold, silver and precious gems were an escort of angels, the monks who followed Lord Buddha to heaven and the Lord Buddha himself at the center. The people made special offerings of foods, flowers and gifts to celebrate the return of the Lord Buddha.



From this legend, it became a tradition that Buddhist monks also need three months of retreat. During this time, they study the scriptures and practice meditation. They are forbidden from staying elsewhere outside the temples. After three months, the monks will once again adopt their social responsibilities that include preaching and teaching dharma to the people.

1. A Buddha image is placed in a decorated cart and brought down from a hill, just like the legendary descent from heaven. People line up along the route and place offerings of food in large alms bowls before the image and also to the monks who follow.



2. In the succeeding days after lent, monks are offered new robes in a ceremony called 'Thod Kathin'. This merit-making ceremony lasts for a month and is practiced nationwide.



3. In the central region, the ceremony is called 'Tak Bat Devo' which means "offering of food to the Buddhist monks.' The people in the south call the ceremony 'Chak Phra', which means the 'pulling of the Buddhist monks. Chak Phra is celebrated in southern provinces such as Nakhon Si Thammarat, Pattani, Phattalung, Songkhla and Yala. But the most impressive celebrations take place on the Tapi River in Surat Thani where the ceremony is organized both on land and in the river.



4. People in the northeastern region also celebrate this auspicious occasion. Outstanding ceremonies in the northeast include the Wax Castle festival in Sakon Nakhon and the Lai Rua Fai festival in Nakhon Phanom. Both are well-recognized Ok Phansa celebrations. The events are made all the more impressive with decorated traditional boat races, cultural performances, parades and regattas.

Festival during Ok Phansa



Wax Castle Festival



- **Date(s):** 1 - 4 October 2009
- **Venue:** Sanam Ming Mueang, Suan Somdej Phra Srinagarindra, Sakon Nakhon
- One of the biggest events in the Ok Phansa Day (The end of Buddhist Lent), the assemble of the wonderful wax castles which are created from the talent artists in the province.
- Experience the magnificent Wax Castle Procession and feast your eyes on the wonderful tradition of Sakon Nakhon people.



Bang Fai Phaya Nak



- **Date(s):** End of Buddhist Lent
- **Venue:** Mekong River, Nong Khai
- This extraordinary miracle always occurs at the beginning of the full moon night in the eleventh lunar month (End of Buddhist Lent). It can be seen along the Mekong River in the districts of Mueang, Phon Phisai, Pak Khat, Bung Kan, Tha Bo, Si Chiang Mai and Sangkhom.
- Bang Fai Phaya Nak is a term used for red and pinkish fire balls, which according to belief, belong to Phaya Nak or the great serpent of the underwater world.
- On the day marking the End of Buddhist Lent, a great number of people come to witness this phenomenon.

Tak Bat Devo



- **Date(s):** 5 October 2009
- **Venue:** Wat Sangkat Rattana Khiri, Uthai Thani Province
- The traditional of "Tak Bat Devo" was derived from the word "Devorohana" which means the return of Lord Buddha from Heaven to Earth. According to a Buddhist myth, after Lord Buddha had proclaimed his doctrines and sermoned his father and relatives, he recollected his mother who died after giving birth to him and was born again in Heaven

Vegetarian Festival



- **Date(s):** 17 - 26 October 2009
- **Venue:** Various Chinese shrines, Mueang District, Phuket
- The Thai-Chinese in Phuket have long passed on the vegetarian festival to purify mind and soul by refraining from meat consumption and meditating.
- Symbolising the presence of the deities throughout the festival are 9 lanterns lit up and placed aloft on Ko Teng poles.
- On the 6th day of the festival, there will be religious processions and incredible displays of face-and-body piercing.
- On the last day, there will be a “Koi Han” ceremony to exorcize ill fortune and a farewell ceremony for the deities at night.