

8th Annual FamCam Reunion Water Festival Culture Class

1. Learn How To Say Water Festival

B'oun Om Tuk

2. What do we know about the Water Festival?

The Water Festival in Cambodia takes place each year in October or November, at the time of the full moon, and is the most extravagant and exuberant festival in the Khmer calendar, outdoing even the new year celebrations.

Starting on the day of the full moon in late October or early November, up to a million people from all walks of life and from all over the country flock to the banks of the Tonle Sap and Mekong Rivers in Phnom Penh to watch traditional boats racing on a huge scale. Every year more than 400 of the brightly colored boats with over 2,500 paddlers battled it out for top honors. The boat racing dates back to ancient times marking the strength of the powerful Khmer marine forces during the Khmer empire.

During the day, the boats race in pairs along a kilometer-long course, and then in the evening brightly decorated floats cruise along the river prior to and during the nightly fireworks displays. There is often a parallel festival at Angkor Wat and although it is smaller in scale it is just as impressive due to the backdrop of Angkor Wat.

The festival marks the changing of the flow of the Tonle Sap River and is also seen as thanksgiving to the Mekong River for providing the country with fertile land and abundant fish. It is at this time when the river flow reverts to its normal downstream direction. In a remarkable phenomenon, the Tonle Sap River earlier reverses its course as the rainy season progresses, with the river flowing "upstream" to Tonle Sap Lake. Then as the rainy season tapers off, the river changes direction once again as the swollen Tonle Sap Lake begins to empty back into the Mekong River, leaving behind vast quantities of fish.



The Khmer people choose the full moon of Khe Kadek as the time to conduct the water festival, the procession of illuminated floats, the salutation to the moon, and the Auk Ambok as a means to express their profound thanks to the Mekong River and Tonlé Sap River. The festival is usually held for three days, i.e. the 14th and 15th of the waxing moon and the 1st of the waning moon. Festivities take place in front of the Royal Palace.

During three days many Cambodians have to settle their daily works ready in the mornings so that they will have chances to revel in the traditional celebration in front of the Royal Palace in the afternoons and enjoy viewing the fireworks displays early in the evenings

Lowell's water festival is modeled after celebrations held in Cambodia and other Southeast Asian nations, traditionally in November, to commemorate the finish of their harvest season. One of the largest water festival in the world is held on the Mekong River in Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia.

Web Resources

JJ's powerpoint presentation will be available on the Famcam web site.
<http://www.famcam.org>

Cambodia's Water Festival
http://www.thingsasian.com/goto_article/article.1655.html

Cambodia Water Festival
<http://www.parish-without-borders.net/cditt/cambodia/cambodia.htm>

Good photos of Water Festival in PP
<http://www.aloofhosting.com/cambodia/bonomtouk.htm>

Q&A: Water Festival from the King
http://www.cambodia.gov.kh/unisql1/egov/english/question.view.html?doc_oid=@120%7C1%7C1

History of the Water Festival
<http://www.cambodiaforums.com/about799.html>

Reversing River Information
http://cambodia.worldvision.org.nz/tw_cambodia_country_geography.asp

Cambodian Water Festival/Article
<http://asiantrail.com/pages/contest04one.html>

Picture of Water Festival on Cambodian Riel
<http://www.banknotes.com/KH54.JPG>

Article about the 2001 Water Festival
http://www.leisurecambodia.com/Leisure_Cambodia/No.05/Celebration.htm

A River Runs through it
http://www.gonomad.com/happenings/0011/bushoff_bonnomtoug.html