

LOY KRATHONG TRADITION



Department of Cultural Promotion, Ministry of Culture, Thailand



Message from the Minister of Culture

Thailand has inherited the Loy Krathong tradition since the ancient time. It takes place on the full moon evening of the 12th lunar month with the bright moonlight reflecting on clear and clean water. When the atmosphere is suitable, Krathong, lotus-shaped vessels containing candles, incense sticks and flowers are released to float in the rivers, canals and waterways. Some people believe that Loy Krathong tradition is to pay gratitude to Lord Buddha as the lotus-shaped vessels are floated to worship His legendary footprint and His topknot cut off at His self-ordination situated in Tavatimsa, the second level of heaven. In the meantime, some people believe that Loy Krathong is to express gratitude to the Goddess of Water. This cultural tradition may vary from locality to locality in accordance with the local beliefs. Loy Krathong tradition reflects the wisdom, lifestyle and culture of Thailand such as costumes, the arts of creating Krathongs and lanterns, rituals, local entertainment, folk arts and performances. Besides, Loy Krathong tradition helps to bring out the virtues and the good values to members of the society: conservation of natural resources and social participations such as beauty contest, Krathong contest and folk plays. Various activities organised on the occasion of the Loy Krathong tradition will lead to the conservation and continuation of Thai Cultural tradition.

The Ministry of Culture has a policy to promote Loy Krathong tradition of each locality in order to create revenue, reputation and identity of community as well as disseminate and promote this tradition among ASEAN member countries and worldwide.

I hope this booklet “Loy Krathong: Save Water and Conserve Culture” will enhance the readers with a better understanding of Loy Krathong tradition and be a part of the conservation of Thai heritages.

VIRA ROJPOJCHANARAT

(Vira Rojpojchanarat)
Minister of Culture

Preface

Loy Krathong festival has been inscribed on the National Intangible Cultural Heritage List in the domain of social practices, rituals and festive events since 2011.

At present, Loy Krathong festival has gained large popularity among the Thais and friends of Thailand. Several provinces celebrate Loy Krathong festival at the highest possible level and have been noted as featuring the most spectacular and unique style of celebrating the Thai festival, which has made it widely known.

Having recognized the intrinsic values of the festival in the family, the community, the society and the religion that are worth passing on to the next generation, the Ministry of Culture has entrusted the Department of Cultural Promotion to publish the booklet of “Loy Krathong: Save Water and Conserve Culture” in order to share the knowledge of Loy Krathong festival and raise public awareness of water conservation for ecosystem and human well-being. I hope this booklet will provide proper information to the readers for better understanding, while participating, appreciating and continuing the good tradition of Loy Krathong festival.



(Kitsayapong Siri)
Permanent Secretary for Culture
Ministry of Culture

Preface

Loy Krathong is a significant ancient tradition of Thailand which takes place on the full moon evening of the 12th lunar month when the rivers reach the highest level. The origin of the tradition derives from ceremony in connection with “water” which is an essential factor of Thai people. Even though the objectives or the beliefs of Loy Krathong may differ but a common meaning of this tradition is the expression of “gratitude” to the value of water which reflects elegant Thai culture.

At present, Thai people give decreasingly significance of Loy Krathong’s meaning, value, substance and desirable practice. The Department of Cultural Promotion has therefore published the booklet of “Loy Krathong Tradition: Preserve Water and Conserve Culture” in order to disseminate the meaning, value, substance, practice and knowledge on the local Loy Krathong tradition in the four regions of Thailand. In addition, this publication also provides the guidance for the correct practices of the tradition in both Thai and English version in order to disseminate value, substance and importance of Loy Krathong tradition including the practice of Thai tradition which will create a good image in the country and abroad. Hopefully, this booklet gathers proper guidance and correct understanding of Loy Krathong tradition which government, private, public and local sectors can apply this proper practices in order to inherit Loy Krathong tradition as the expression of thanks to the water and the joyful tradition on full moon of the 12th lunar month.



(Chai Nakhonchai)

Director-General

Department of Cultural Promotion

Loy Krathong Tradition

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Loy Krathong Tradition is a ceremony to honor the Goddess of the river. In Thailand, it is annually held on full moon day in November. Krathongs are small vessels or cups often made of cut banana stems, leaf and contain flowers, candles and joss sticks. They are released in the rivers and left to float downstream. Upon releasing the Krathongs, people ask for forgiveness to the Goddess of the river for polluting her. It is one of the religious customs in Thailand. During this period, at the end of the rain season, most areas around rivers and canals are flooded. This occurrence sparked an old Thai saying; in the 11th lunar month there is flooding and in the 12th lunar month the (stagnant) flood waters are retreating. This period is a time for rejoicing as the weather is changing for the better. The rain season is more or less over and the winter or cool season is beginning. The moon is also at its brightest this time of the year. At present, Loy Krathong Tradition is a major celebration in Thailand.



Objectives

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The objectives are various depending on different customs and beliefs.

1. To pay homage to the Lord Buddha's descent from the second heaven (where Indra dwells) after staying in a Buddhist monastery during the Buddhist lent in order to preach a sermon to his royal mother.

2. To pay homage to the heavenly Pagoda containing the Lord Buddha's top knot cut off at his self-ordination.

3. To pay homage to the Lord Buddha's foot print on the bank of the Nammatha River in India.

4. To pay tribute to the senior disciple Upakut, who found his recluse in the ocean (a belief inherited from Myanmar; the priest had supernatural powers in conquering the God of Evil).

5. To pay homage to God Phaka Prom living in the third heaven.

6. To thank the Goddess Mae Khongkha, the Mother of Water, which a source of water for human use.

7. To worship the Goddess Mae Khongkha, the Mother of Water, asking for forgiveness for polluting her.

8. To remind the benevolence of ancestors
9. To float one's sufferings away, this practice is similar to the Sin Floating Rite of Brahmin.
10. To ask for blessing.



Loy Krathong Tradition: Expression of Gratitude

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Thai people express their gratitude to the Goddess of Water for nourishing their lives by celebrating Loy Krathong. However, depending on beliefs, Loy Krathong is also celebrated to express gratitude to the Lord Buddha or paying homage to ancestors. To make a long story short one can say Loy Krathong Tradition is about expressing gratitude.

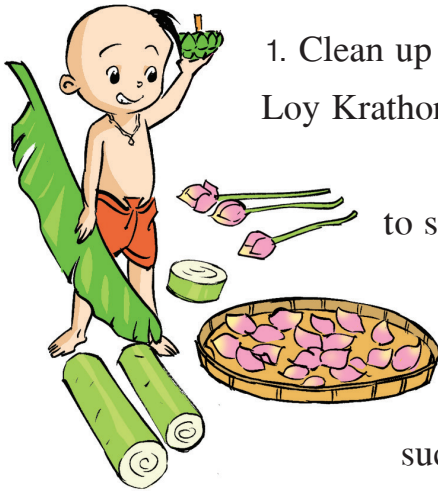


Values of Loy Krathong Tradition



1. Family Value : relationships between family members are tightened as family members are celebrating together.
2. Community Value : communities are more harmonious by joining in the Loy Krathong activities.
3. Religious Value : Buddhist practices such as merit making, practicing dharma and sermons are essential parts of Loy Krathong celebration; therefore, they contribute to strengthen religious beliefs.
4. Social Value : raising awareness in water resources conservation.

Activities that should be promoted



1. Clean up the rivers, both before and after Loy Krathong celebration.

2. Perform good deeds, listen to sermons, and practice the dharma.

3. Utilize local bio-degradable materials in making Krathongs.

4. Promote alternative activities such as a Krathong Contest, Hot-air

Balloon Contest and others. Presently, the Noppamas

Queen contest (The daughter of a Brahman priest and a lady at the Court of King Phra Ruang of Sukhothai, who developed a new style of lotus flower which were to be floated on the streaming waters at night to please the King) is a new, but indispensable feature.

5. Save use of fireworks in order to avoid hurting people or damaging properties.

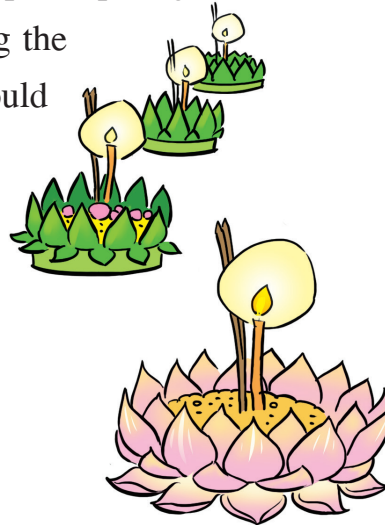
6. Don't drink alcohol or quarrel with others, especially, don't drive drunk.

Conclusion

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The Loy Krathong Tradition has been part of the Thai culture and way of living for a long time. At full moon night of the Thai 12th month (November) whole Thai people gather at the river banks and ask for blessings and forgiveness from the Goddess of the River by releasing Krathongs. Thousands of candle lights released at the same time illuminate the river brilliantly and is an eerie but beautiful spectacle. The traditional custom has become a major attraction for foreign tourist participating

in the activities and enjoying the Thai hospitality. But we should not forget the real message of Loy Krathong: Gratitude to the River



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