



Loi Kathong or Lai Huea Fai

Loi Kathong or Lai Huea Fai as it is traditionally called in Laos is a festival celebrated annually in Laos, Thailand, and Burma. The name could be translated as "to float a basket", and comes from the tradition of making kathong or buoyant, decorated baskets, which are then floated on a river.

Loi Kathong takes place on the evening of the full moon of the 12th month in the traditional Lao lunar calendar. In the western calendar this usually falls in November.

The traditional kathong are made from a slice of the trunk of a banana tree or a spider lily plant. Modern kathongs are more often made of bread or styrofoam. A bread kathong will disintegrate after a few days and can be eaten by fish. Banana stalk kathong are also biodegradable, but styrofoam kathongs are sometimes banned, as they pollute the rivers and may take years to decompose. A kathong is decorated with elaborately-folded banana leaves, incense sticks, flowers, and a candle as an offering to the river spirits.

On the night of the full moon, kathong are launched on a river, canal or a pond. The festival may originate from an ancient ritual paying respect to the water spirits.

It was a animist festival that was adapted by Buddhists in Laos, Thailand, and Burma to honor Buddha. The candle venerates the Buddha with light, while the kathong's floating symbolizes letting go of all one's hatred, anger, and defilements. Many Lao people would write down what they want to let go and stick it on the Kathong as flags. It is bad luck to take a Kathong from the water because it is believed that if you take a Kathong, you will also inherit whatever bad things the people releasing the Kathong is trying to let go. However, many ordinary people use the kathong to thank the river Gods or Naggas.