

Khmer New Year's Games

This year, the Khmer people celebrate the Khmer new year (meaning Chaul Chhnam or entering the year) from 13-15 April. As with the new year in many countries, it is a time of renewal and Khmer people clean their houses, make offerings at a pagodas and play traditional games such as Angkunh and Chaol Chhung. Everybody should sweep and keep clean the interior and exterior of their home. During the dark hours, they make preparations - light lamps and torches, collect flowers and garlands - to welcome the new year.

The kindness and peace of the first three days are of supreme importance, so Cambodians do not insult, curse or beat anyone. They keep the days religious so that the new year will be a good one. The first three days are the most important as they must be kept absolutely pure. The main entrance of the pagodas throughout the country will be decked with garlands of flowers and coconut leaves.

Monks and devotees would have cleaned the wats carefully and bathed the statues of Buddha in perfumed water

Cambodians often take this opportunity to engage in good natured teasing among their friends and relatives. One common practice is to smear white powder on other people's faces, while another is to splash water on unsuspecting party.

ANGKUNH

The Angkunh is a fruit that grows on trees found predominantly in Stung Treng and Kratie. Measuring about 5 centimeters in diameter, it is flat on both sides. When it ripens, it becomes very hard and turns a dark brown color. The game of Angkunh requires two teams of several players each. The teams stand some distance apart, with a triangle made of three Angkunh stuck to the ground. In turn, each player tosses the fruit, frisbee style, into the opponent's triangle. He wins when all the fruit are knock down or when the Angkunh stops in the triangle. The winner exacts his prize by tapping the opponent's bent knee with the flat sides of the fruit. The hollow sound it makes usually sends the players into fits of delighted laughter.

CHAOL CHHUNG

This game is an opportunity to meet with the opposite sex, and utilises the ubiquitous Krama (scarf). Two teams- one composed of boys and one of girls - play the game. A Krama is rolled into a ball, with a tail hanging out. The game begins when a boy from the team throws the ball into the air. Before the ball touches the ground, a girl has to make a grab for it with the aim of hitting the boy she fancies. The girls also gets to toss the Krama ball into the air while the boys get to aim it at the girls they like. Whoever is hit by the ball has to go to the opposite side to sing a song as a "punishment".