

## Basic Facts about Khmer New Year

If you are an active person and you do not have much time to read a lengthy book or article about Khmer New Year, this article is just for you! Some of you might have heard about this festival before; some of you might not. In this article, we are going to share with you some basic information about Khmer New Year, highlighting two main aspects: an overview of Khmer New Year and the common festival activities. Additionally, in the last part of the article, there are some useful greetings that you can learn too.

**Khmer New Year**, typically said “**Bun Choul Chhnam Khmer**” in Khmer language, is one of the most important traditional festivals in Cambodia. It is a very enjoyable time of the year. This festival is celebrated in April annually. It usually lasts for three days and falls on either 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> of the month. Each festival day is named differently, and each has its own individual meaning. The first day is called “**Moha Sangkran**”: this is the inauguration of the new angel who comes to take care of the earth. The second day is “**Wanabot**”: the day when people offer presents to elder relatives. The last day is called “**Leung Sak**”: this day starts the New Year circle. For instance, this year (2017), the year of the rooster<sup>1</sup>, the Khmer New Year celebration is from 14<sup>th</sup> until 16<sup>th</sup> April. Therefore, 14<sup>th</sup> April is Moha Sangkran day, 15<sup>th</sup> April is Wannabot day, and 16<sup>th</sup> April is Leung Sak day and also the beginning day of the New Year cycle. Because the New Year falls on Friday this year, the angel that is believed to take care of the universe is Kemera Devi<sup>2</sup>, one of Kabel Moha Prom’s daughters.

What are the typical activities that happen before and during Khmer New Year? A few days before the New Year’s arrival, people normally clean their house and buy fruits and other things needed to prepare to welcome the new angel. On Moha Sangkran day, people welcome the new angel by making offerings (as in figure 1). On Wanabot day, some people offer charity by helping the poor, servants and homeless and/or some go to monasteries to pay respect to their ancestors and offer food to the monks. On Leung Sak day, some people clean their statue of Buddha with scented water or wash the feet of their elders to get blessings in return. In brief, those activities are done as a means of receiving prosperity and blessings for life.



*Figure 1: offerings to the new angel*

During this occasion, students and business professionals in both the private and public sector are entitled to some days off. Some business people also close their shops or companies to celebrate this festival with their families. The city usually becomes quieter during this time. It is busier and full of fun in the provinces as people travel to their hometowns for family gatherings in the provinces. Some spend their holiday in the resorts outside of the city. Also, at some pagodas, especially those in the rural areas, people play Khmer New Year traditional games, for example, Bos Ongkunh Leak Konsaeng (Hiding the scarf), Teagn Prot, Joal Chhoung and Veay Ka-orm (See figure 2)<sup>3</sup>. What’s more, in some villages, the villagers throw parties and do Khmer dancing together with their families and neighbors.

Last but not least, expressing greetings during this occasion is both important and meaningful. What people normally wish each other on this auspicious occasion is “Happy New Year”: “soo-a s’day ch’num t’mey” in Khmer. Also, they may say “I wish you a good luck”: “k’nyom choun-por nay-uk oay mee-an

<sup>1</sup><http://www.cambodiasite.nl/newyear.htm>

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.cam-cc.org/calendar/newyear\\_angel.php](http://www.cam-cc.org/calendar/newyear_angel.php)

<sup>3</sup><http://www.cambodiaadoptionconnection.com/home/chaul-chnam-thmey/games-and-activities>

som-naang laa-or”, “I wish you a good health”: “k’nyom chounpor nay-uk oay mee-an sok-khak-pee-ap laa-or”.

**Figure 2: Khmer New Year games**

**Source: Google**



Hopefully, you have found this article helpful. To get more insights about Khmer New Year, please refer to the following reference links:

1. <http://www.tourismcambodia.com/tripplanner/events-in-cambodia/khmer-new-year.htm>
2. [http://www.phnom-penh.biz/restonet/pp/annuaire.nsf/webpages/khmer\\_new\\_year\\_2550.html!opendocument&l=gb](http://www.phnom-penh.biz/restonet/pp/annuaire.nsf/webpages/khmer_new_year_2550.html!opendocument&l=gb)
3. <http://www.cambodiasite.nl/newyear.htm>
4. <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/7days/seven-angels-and-new-year-riddle>
5. [http://www.officeholidays.com/countries/cambodia/cambodian\\_new\\_year.php](http://www.officeholidays.com/countries/cambodia/cambodian_new_year.php)
6. <http://www.cambodiaadoptionconnection.com/home/chaul-chnam-thmey/games-and-activities>
7. [http://www.phnom-penh.biz/restonet/pp/annuaire.nsf/webpages/khmer\\_new\\_year\\_2550.html!opendocument&l=gb](http://www.phnom-penh.biz/restonet/pp/annuaire.nsf/webpages/khmer_new_year_2550.html!opendocument&l=gb)

Written by: **Pisey CHAN**, *Language and Cultural Specialist of Making It Easy*