

Miracle Year

amazing THAILAND

Always Amazes You

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Songkran Splendour 2012

SONGKRAN, the traditional Thai New Year celebrations, take place during April 9 - 22. Across the country, it's a time for laughter and entertainment... for religious ceremonies and merit-making... for families and friends.

And of course for splashing water – lots of it!

A spirit of good-natured fun permeates the holiday season. Songkran embodies the essential caring and unity at the core of Thai society – enduring qualities that make Thailand truly amazing.

Songkran is a word from the Sanskrit language which means 'move into' and refers to the orbit of the sun moving into Aries. It marks the end of a 12-month cycle and the beginning of a new solar year. Songkran is therefore the Thai New Year celebrations.

This traditional Thai custom of merry-making is the Kingdom's most *sanuk* (fun-filled) festival, celebrated with tremendous enthusiasm, nation-wide, once a year. In most parts of the country, Songkran extends over a period of 3 days.

Known the world-over for its characteristic tradition of water-throwing ranging from a courteous sprinkle or a polite splash, to harmless water pistols and showers from garden hoses to the well-aimed bucket or water-cannon delivered in a festive spirit. Without a doubt, on the practical side, Songkran is a refreshing solution to 'beating the heat' in the hottest season of the year. There is however a much deeper significance to 'Songkran'.

Apart from marking a new beginning, Songkran is also a time for thanksgiving. It is an important time for individuals to reflect upon the many acts of kindness and thoughtfulness each has personally experienced and to remember how such acts of generosity and compassion bring peace, happiness and well-being. Songkran is also the time for reunions and family ties to be renewed.

At the heart of each Thai custom and tradition, there is always a logical reason for its existence. The festive elements of the celebration, the cultural values, the social code of conduct and individual belief and practices are intertwined. Songkran embodies the traditional Thai cultural values.

The underlying significance of Songkran is the process of cleansing and purification – the purging of all ills, misfortune and evil and starting the New Year afresh with all that is good and pure. Water is symbolic of the cleaning process and signifies purity.



Thai new year
celebrations

April 9-22, 2012

**Bangkok - Ayutthaya - Phra Pradaeng - Chiang Mai - Sukhotai - Phuket
- Samut Prakan - Samut Songkhram - Suphan Buri - Chon Buri -
Ratchaburi - Hat Yai - Khon Kaen - Nong Khai - Si Satchanalai
- Nakhon Si Thammarat - Nakhon Phanom.**

Director's Message

SAWATDI KHRAP.

THERE have been quite a few festivals over the last two months and there's more coming our way. Most important to the Thais of which is the Thai New Year come April 13. It is also a month of much merry-making as we usher in the Buddhist calendar year with the Songkran Festival. This festival has become extremely popular among Malaysians who travel to Thailand to celebrate with their Thai counterparts, most especially in the southern city of Hat Yai. It is also the venue of the midnight Songkran, with festivities beginning on the night of April 12.

As we usher in the Thai New Year, I feel it is also an appropriate time to say a big thank you to all our tourism partners – travel agents, airlines, motoring clubs, and event organisers. Last but not least our gratitude also goes out to YOU, who have made Thailand your favourite travel destination. You have helped us not only meet our target, but in fact surpass our earlier projections. For the whole of last year, a total of 2,470,868 Malaysian tourists visited Thailand and we owe you a big thank you. For 2012, we certainly hope you would continue to give us your support.

Two new flights are in within these two months. AirAsia has introduced direct flights three times weekly from LCCT to Surat Thani. Not only will visitors be able to explore a new destination but they can also hop on a ferry for a trip to Koh Samui which had become hugely popular with foreigners and locals alike.

Bangkok Airways is also flying direct from Kuala Lumpur to Koh Samui, offering more choices to those wanting to spend their holidays on the island and the surroundings. Two other airlines – Firefly and Berjaya Air also fly from Kuala Lumpur to the island.

Bird lovers would be happy to know that the Asian Barred Ground Dove Singing Competition would be held in the province of Yala for the whole month of March. Doves from countries around the region would be taking part in the international competition.

Those who love visiting floating market should also take note that two new ones had opened up in Hua Hin – the Hua Hin Floating Market and Hua Hin Sam Phan Nam Floating Market.

As you can read in our newsletter, there are many other events and festivals during the months of March and April such as the Phrae Wa Silk Festival in Kalasin Province, the Chumphon Sea World Fair and the Krabi Rock and Fire International Contest just to name a few.

Rest assured that you would always find something to do anywhere you are in Thailand. We look forward to welcoming you to Amazing Thailand. We hope to continue amazing you.

Thank you.

MR WIBOON NIMITRWANICH
Director
Malaysia & Brunei

Towards making Thailand a destination of choice

TOURISM Authority of Thailand Governor Suraphon Svetsreni had identified three key challenges in its mission to make Thailand the destination of choice for travellers from all over the world.

These are:

1. Changing socio-economic factors,
2. Paradigm shifts in the way global population think and act and the way each country strengthens its competitiveness and
3. The importance of crisis management and communications.

He said today's market structure was quite different from before and although Thailand welcomed about 19.09 million international arrivals in 2011, a detailed look at the market structure shows challenges in the landscape, or geography.

The arrival figures last year was 3.16 million higher than 2010 and represented a growth of 19.84 per cent.

Mr Suraphon said the challenge was how to handle this changing market structure. "As we have realised the market shift for some time, the TAT has been deploying a *Look East Strategy*."

It included concrete initiatives; such as, opening more TAT offices in Asia, in Mumbai, Jakarta, Kunming, Chengdu and Guangzhou.

He also said global warming was affecting lifestyles, tourism, and even the quality of natural tourism sites. Thailand had experienced coral bleaching due to the rising temperature of seawater. Many regions of the world have also seen extended summers or winters due to seasonal fluctuations.

Awareness of changes in the environment is leading to greener lifestyles and more eco-friendly consumption values.

Another aspect of the paradigm shift involves how countries develop a competitive edge. There is more competitiveness gained through alliances in which countries take a *win-win approach* to economic policies. This concept has led to *Econo-*



mic Blocs in many regions, including ASEAN.

The TAT's experience shows that no matter what type of crisis occurs – economic, political, health issues, natural disasters, or terrorism – there is always some impact on the tourism sector. International travellers are very sensitive to situations and incidents, particularly in today's world where news travels very fast through many channels, especially those

online.

Due to the proliferation of social media and the moment-to-moment reporting by citizen journalists and I-Reporters, this makes crisis management and communications more difficult for the tourism industry. As the parties often involved in a crisis are not tourism-related, the TAT has to wait for accurate information from others, which further delays communications.

Realising the importance of responding rapidly to a crisis situation, the TAT established the Tourism Intelligence Unit and Crisis Management Centre or TIC. It is a centralised co-ordination centre that collects information and implements communications response plans when a crisis situation arises.

The TAT uses traditional and online media channels to communicate in a timely manner with the most up-to-date, correct, and relevant information. We have invested in information technology for crisis communications; such as, distributing situation updates, and live broadcasts from webcams at popular tourist attractions. We also do online crisis and reputation management, monitoring 32,000 web sites and being involved in more than 20 social media channels worldwide.

Mr Suraphon stressed that these were the three major challenges that we must respond to carefully. There would also be many more minor challenges ahead; such as the changing socio-economy that drives changes in market segmentation; and issues like energy and currency fluctuations.

Annual Kalasin Prae Wa silk festival

*Rim Pao Hotel, Amphoe Muang Kalasin
February 26 - March 7, 2012*

THE intricate and colourful designs of *Prae Wa* the 'queen of silks' makes this fabric the most exquisite and most famous of all of the handicrafts of Kalasin Province.

The annual Kalasin Prae Wa Silk Festival, the largest cultural festival of Kalasin Province, opens with a grand ceremony, followed by a spectacular procession.

For festive fun and entertainment, the silk festival also features a variety of contests and competitions. Among them are:

- A contest of the finest *Prae Wa* silk
- The decoration of shops using *Prae Wa*
- A *Prae Wa* Costumes Contest
- A Song and Dance contest

Another key element of the Silk Festival is The Best of Kalasin fair. Visitors to the fair are able

to shop for a wide-range of local products and merchandise, especially Prae Wa silk, ready-to-wear clothes in Prae Wa silk as well as gems.

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Biggest floating market in SE Asia



BEING the oldest seaside resort in Thailand, Hua Hin retains a lot of the old, which combines well with new developments to make the town a lively travel destination, just two hours' drive outside Bangkok.

Added to all the cultural and historical attractions are two new floating markets – the Hua Hin Floating Market and Hua Hin Sam Phan Nam Floating Market.

Hua Hin Floating Market is located on a 6.4 hectare (40 rai) plot of land while the Hua Hin Sam Phan Nam Floating Market is on a 16-hectare (100 rai) plot. Both are on Soi Hua Hin 112, not too far from the city centre.

True to its history, both floating markets have traditional themes from the days of King Rama V and King Rama VI in their food and shopping areas.

Sam Phan Nam Floating Market has some 200 outlets offering food and souvenirs and an additional 50 boats selling hot meals. Another new market section in classical Greek style architecture is scheduled to be built. There will also be outdoor activities like cable ski service, water screen shows and paddle boat service around the market.

Hua Hin Floating Market recreates the atmosphere of old Hua Hin featuring more than 130 shops and 30 wooden boats selling hot meals, snacks and beverages. There would also be local performances three times a day, including an elephant show by Hua Hin Safari.

Hua Hin Sam Phan Nam Floating Market is open from 9am to 7pm (Mondays to Fridays) and 9am to 8pm on weekends. Hua Hin Floating Market is open daily from 9am to 9pm.

Other attractions around the floating markets are Wat Huay Mongkol and Pak-U Waterfall nearby.

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THAILAND has soul. So many people get involved in tourism with their arts, crafts and in the market places. And people are so accommodating. I like that. When you go to a country you want to feel secure and feel that the people you meet are part of your friends. You don't want to feel alienated. In Thailand I feel embraced. Sometimes you go out and the whole village comes to greet you. You feel so loved and so welcomed.

It's important to me to connect people through food and culture. For the past 26 years I've been promoting Thailand on my cooking show. For a small country, it has a lot to offer – food, culture, beaches and it's easy. It definitely has one of the world's best cuisines. I like the freshness, the curries – there's so much flavour here. I really like the diversity from one region to another. And ohh... there is such fantastic seafood here! I want people to travel – I want



young chefs to explore the world. I want the whole world to connect to Thailand because it has the best of what Asia has to offer.

Top-3 Favourites:

- Cooking school! It's so cheap for what you can learn — and you get to eat as well!
- A spa for relaxation. Go to Chiva Som, if you can afford it, and get pampered.
- Koh Lipeh (in Trang) in southern Thailand. I was there earlier this year for my 52nd birthday with friends from London and New York.

Datuk Chef Redzuawan Ismail
Celebrity Chef from Malaysia & Recipient of the Friends of Thailand Award on the Asian Food Network Channel

Chumphon Sea World Fair

Thung Wua Laen Beach, Pha Thiew district
March 23 – 25, 2012

THE Chumphon Sea World Fair, held annually in March promotes travel to the province of Chumphon – the gateway to Southern Thailand.

HIGHLIGHTS AND ACTIVITIES

- Shop for special attractively-priced Chumphon Sea World Fair travel packages
- Travel exhibits presented by various organizations and agencies

In addition to the eco-tours of the coastal mangrove forests, diving, boating and squid fishing in Chumphon National Park, visitors are presented with a vast range of interesting options such as river-rafting in Pa-Toh, a visit to the Chumphon National Museum or historical sites, agrotourism and community-based tourism projects such as Ban Ko Phithak Community and Phato Ecotourism Club.

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Amazing Thailand Road Show in Penang & KL



A TOTAL of 35 sellers from Thailand led by the Tourism Authority of Thailand from Bangkok held two road shows in Penang and Kuala Lumpur recently.

The two events served as a platform to present new attractions and packages to the local buyers and serve as an exercise to instill the confidence back in local buyers that Thailand had recovered from the flooding that took place towards the end of last year.

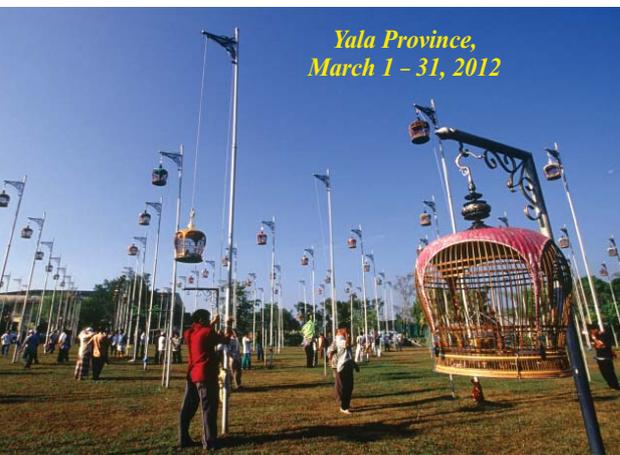
The sellers, made up of 27 hoteliers, seven tra-

vel agents and one airline, were from Bangkok, Pattaya, Phuket, Surat Thani, Phangnga, Krabi and Chiang Mai.

They had an opportunity to meet buyers made up of travel agents from Penang, Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. Both functions were also attended by the local Press.

The travel agents and Press were later entertained by a group of dancers, specially brought in for the two occasions who put on a cultural performance during the dinner functions.

Dove-cooing competition



Yala Province,
March 1 - 31, 2012

THAIS have long believed that doves are creatures that bring good luck to those who rear them. They are also regarded as symbols of purity and peace.

Those with qualities specified by ancient texts are believed to bestow great wealth and honour upon the owner.

The practice is widespread throughout the lower southern provinces and neighbouring countries.

A local dove-cooing contest has now evolved into an international event with participants from the neighbouring countries.

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18th Phuket Bike Week

Patong Beach,
April 6-8, 2012

IT is already in its 18th year and the annual Phuket Bike Week Asean Ride Together has turned into one of the biggest motorcycle events in Southeast Asia.

Head on down to Patong Beach, Phuket to see an amazing collection of superbikes like Harley Davidsons, Hondas and other makes at this annual event.

It is certainly a great opportunity for Malaysian bikers to lend their invaluable support to the event just as in previous years when they rode

down to the island to join in the festive occasion.

Music, contests, parties and charity rides would be held around the island.

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Bangkok Airways to fly from KL to Samui

BANGKOK Airways, Asia's boutique airlines, will begin non-stop daily air services between Koh Samui (USM) and Kuala Lumpur (KUL) starting from 31st March 2012.

The promotional round trip ticket fare from KL to Koh Samui (to ticket within 29 February 2012) kicks off at MYR390 (exclusive of taxes, insurance and surcharges)

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's capital city, is the airlines' first destination to Malaysia from Koh Samui since its first operation in 1968. Flight will be operated daily by Airbus 319 serving 138 economy class seats according to the following schedule;

| Route | Flight | Departure | Arrival |
|----------------|--------|-----------|---------|
| Koh Samui - KL | PG951 | 1755 | 2025 |
| KL - Koh Samui | PG952 | 0820 | 0900 |

Passengers will enjoy our boutique services including in-flight meals, baggage allowance of 20kg and boutique lounge at Samui airport.

Presently, Bangkok Airways fly to more than 20 destinations both domestic and international.

From Bangkok, it flies to Chiang Mai, Lampang, Trat, Phuket, Samui, Luang Prabang, Siem Reap, Yangon, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Dhaka and Maldives.

From Koh Samui, it flies to Pattaya (U-Tapao), Trat, Phuket, Krabi, Hong Kong and Singapore.

For more information and reservation, please call 0-2270-6699 or call center 1771 or www.bangkokair.com



Air Asia flies to Surat Thani

LOW cost carrier AirAsia had introduced direct flights to Surat Thani province three times a week from February. Tickets for the route went on sale since December last year.

Surat Thani is the entry point for those intending to visit the resort island of Koh Samui and the surroundings islands such as Koh Pha-ngan and Koh Tao.

The route is AirAsia's sixth destination from Kuala Lumpur to Thailand. AirAsia also flies direct from Kuala Lumpur to Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Phuket, Hat Yai and Krabi.
Contact : www.airasia.com.my

Krabi rock and fire international contest 2012

*Railay Beach and Ton Sai Beach, Krabi.
April 16 – 17, 2012.*

KRABI province on the west coast of Southern Thailand is home to some of the world's most spectacular coastlines featuring a karst landscape with craggy limestone hills, jagged cliffs, steep vertical sided limestone pillars and rock faces and unusual rock formations overlooking the emerald waters of the Andaman Sea, dotted with oddly-shaped verdant tropical islands basking in the sun.

With Krabi offering some 600 rock-climbing

routes, this present numerous challenges for individuals of various levels of skills and experience. The towering cliffs of Railay Beach and Ton Sai Beach attract rock climbers from all over the world and have steadily gained fame as one of the premier rock-climbing destinations.

The 2012 Krabi Rock and Fire International Contest scheduled to be held during April 16-17 will feature two key contest categories namely a lead climbing marathon and speed climbing. The fire contest provides a spectacular added

attraction.

In addition to its natural beauty, Krabi also offers an excellent service infrastructure thereby making it a popular destination for island, beach and adventure holidays.

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Journalists and travel agents visit Trang and Satun

JOURNALISTS and travel agents went on an educational trip to Trang and Satun in south Thailand recently to familiarise themselves with some of the lesser known destinations in the south.

While in Trang they attended the Underwater Wedding ceremony, which had become an annual event during the Valentine's Day period.

In addition they also visited Emerald Cave at Koh Mook, Koh Kradan and Koh Ngai.

They had the chance to sample some of the attractions in Satun such as Koh Lipeh, Koh Tarutao, Koh Hin Ngam, Koh Ror Krui, Koh Hin Zon and Koh Khai.



Poi Sang Long Ceremony 2012

*Pang Lor Temple in Mae Hong Son municipality, Mae Hong Son.
April 1 – 30, 2012*

THE Poi Sang Long ceremony, unique to the province of Mae Hong Son, is a novice ordination ceremony, but it is unlike any other ceremony of its type in the country. Young boys aged between 7 and 14 are ordained as novices so they can spend time studying Buddhist doctrines. It is believed that by pursuing ordination for their parents, they gain merit.

The origins of this festival lie in Buddhist legend. It is believed that the tradition follows in the footsteps of Prince Rahula, the Buddha's own son, who gave up his worldly life to follow his father's spiritual teachings. Prince Rahula became the youngest ordained monk and the first novice in Buddhism. Subsequently it became a tradition for young boys to be ordained so they can undertake the study of Buddhist teachings. With deep reverence for the Buddhist religion, the local residents in Mae Hong Son province are of the view that the celebrations should be as grand as possible.

The first day begins with the boys having their hair shaved off by parents and relatives. They are then bathed and anointed with consecrated waters and dressed in brightly coloured costumes. By the end of this process, the boys are now known as *Sang Long* or *Luuk Kaew* – precious gems.

On the second day, relatives, friends and guests stop by the house of the *Sang Long* host family in order to congratulate the family and present alms.

On the third day, *Hae Krua Lu* day, the grand colourful procession is held in the morning. Well-attended by family members and individuals of importance in Mae Hong Son's Shan community, the procession of the

Sang Long features handmade floats, offerings for the temple and traditional dances. The procession starts out from Chong Kham and Chong Klang Temple in the heart of the city before it moves along the main streets of town and out to the temples.

The procession once again proceeds through the town and the *Sang Long* are escorted to Chong Kham and Chong Klang Temple for the formal ordination ceremony.

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Amazing Thailand Grand Sale Road Show

SELECTED business partner attended a presentation on the Amazing Thailand Grand Sale 2012 road show in Kuala Lumpur recently.

Thailand is still a paradise for shoppers from all over the world, with wide ranges of products and services, good quality and value for money. And one of the programmes that is recognised among tourists is the *Amazing Thailand Grand Sale*, the annual sale event that had been held consecutively for 14 years.

The grand sale, which would be held from June 15 to August 15, would involve 15,000 participating retailers in well-known shopping destinations such as Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Pattaya, Hua Hin, Koh Samui, Hat Yai and Phuket.

The most preferred merchant categories would be department stores and shopping complexes, duty free shops, hotels, airlines, jewellery, spas, golf courses, dining, Thai handicrafts, on-line travel agencies and hospitals.

This year there would be more additional shopping destinations like the newly-opened Terminal 21. Apart from Terminal 21, there are also the Robinson Rama 9, the Megabangna, Central Ladprao and Zen.

Apart from discount of up to 80 per cent for goods and 20 per cent for dining, tourists would get a chance to win the *Miracle 30 Day in Thailand* grand prize.

Plan your trip with participating travel agents or airline and get more privileges via the welcome pack vouchers at the TAT counter, Suvarnabhumi Airport.

For more information and to enjoy games with special rewards, visit: www.tourismthailand.org/thailandgrandsale



Songkran Calendar

BANGKOK AND CENTRAL THAILAND

| | | |
|--|---------------|---|
| Bangkok Songkran Splendours Festival | April 9 – 17 | Bangkok. |
| Suphan Buri Songkran Festival | April 13 – 15 | Along Nen Kaeow Road in the district of Amphoe Suphan Buri. |
| Ayutthaya Songkran Festival (Old Capital's Songkran) | April 13 – 15 | Around the island city and ancient moat of Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya. |
| Ratchaburi Songkran Festival | April 13 – 15 | Woradet Road along the Mae Klong River in the Ratchaburi provincial centre. |
| Mon Songkran Festival at Phra Pradeng | April 20 – 22 | Phra Pradaeng District Office, Samut Prakan. |

THE EASTERN SEABOARD

CHON BURI SONGKRAN FESTIVALS

| | | |
|---|---------------|--|
| Koh Si Chang Songkran Festival | April 13 – 19 | Koh Si Chang Municipality and Koh Khaam Yai island, Chon Buri province. |
| Chon Buri Bang Saen Songkran Wan Lai Sand-Stupa Building Festival | April 16 – 17 | On the beach in Bang Saen, Siracha district, Chon Buri province. |
| Pattaya-Na Kleua Songkran Festival | April 18 – 20 | Along the Pattaya beach front, Wat Chaimongkon in South Pattaya, Chon Buri province. |
| Sri Maharaja Songkran Festival in Chon Buri Province | April 13 – 15 | At Koh Loi Park, Si Racha district. |

NORTHERN THAILAND

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|----------------------------------|---------------|--|
| Sukhotai Songkran Festival | April 12 – 14 | At Wat Traphang Thong in front of the Sukhothai Historical Park. |
| Si Satchanalai Songkran Festival | April 12 – 14 | At Si Satchanalai Historical Park and Phraya Litai Memorial Plaza, Sukhothai province. |

| | | |
|---|---------------|--|
| Chiang Mai Songkran Festival | April 12 – 15 | All around Chiang Mai. |
| Tak Songkran Festival | April 13 – 16 | At Rim Moei Market (Talat Rim Moei), Mae Sot district. |
| Tak Province Khao Kap Songkran Festival | April 13 – 15 | Haat Sai Tong on the bank of the Ping River. |

NORTHEASTERN THAILAND

| | | |
|---|---------------|---|
| Nong Khai I-San Grand Songkran Festival | April 13 – 15 | At Wat Pho Chai temple and Hat Chomani beach near the Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge that spans the Mekong River. |
| Nakhon Phanom-Lao Songkran Festival | April 11 – 15 | Meuang District (Nakhon Phanom provincial centre) and Renu Nakhon Municipality. |
| Dok Khun Siang Khaen Festival Sticky Rice Walking Street (Thanon Khao Neow), Khon Kaen Province | April 13 – 15 | At Bueng Kaen Nakhon Cultural Centre and Si Chan Road (also known as Khao Neow Road). |

SOUTHERN THAILAND

| | | |
|---|---------------|--|
| Hat Yai Midnight Songkran Festival | April 11 – 13 | Odeon Shopping Center intersection, Niphath Uthit 3 Road, Sanehanusorn Road, Sala Thai at Laem Samila cape, Klong Hae floating market, the Hat Yai municipal fresh market, Sadao and Institute of Southern Thai Studies. |
| Songkran – the Water Festival on the Beach | April 13 – 15 | Loma (Dolphin) Public Park, The Port, Jungceylon – the International Shopping & Leisure Destination on Pattong Beach. |
| Songkran Festival in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province | April 11 – 15 | Wat Phra Boromthath and Si Thamma Sokarat Park, Sanam Na Meuang, Phra Narai and Phra I-suan Hall. |