



Journey with Newspapers In Education and Wing Luke Museum to Celebrate the New Year!

Asian Americans bring with them many holidays from their ancestral homelands. One of the most important celebrations is the New Year.

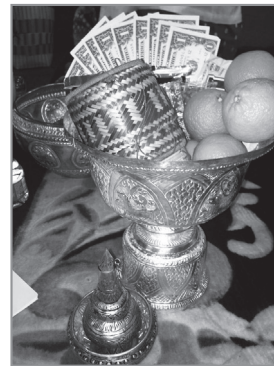
Learn about Pii Mai Lao, Lao New Year, through the eyes of Phonetip Sivilay, a Lao American whose parents came to the U.S. from Laos in 1981. Family and tradition were essential to Phonetip's upbringing, which was deeply rooted in Lao tradition.

NEW YEAR TRADITIONS

Pii Mai Lao (pronounced "Pbe-e My Lao") is celebrated April 13 to 15. In Laos, this is the hottest time of the year, before the start of monsoon season. Symbolizing change and rebirth, Pii Mai Lao is the largest and most important festival in the country. Based on the Buddhist calendar, the 2014 Lao New Year will be an observance of the 2,557th year since Buddha's enlightenment.



Performance at Health Leadership International Annual Benefit



During Pii Mai Lao, people make offerings at Buddhist temples.

Celebrating it keeps Phonetip (pronounced "Pon-tip") involved in Lao culture. It's a time to give blessings, make offerings at Buddhist temples and ask for forgiveness from elders. In a "baci" ceremony, each person speaks words of good fortune to loved ones as a yarn is tied around their wrist.

Water scented with perfume is used to rinse the hands of parents and elders, and to splash on friends as a blessing. Phonetip says that in Laos, "Some cities become a 'wet fest,' but here (in the U.S.) kids use water guns and warmer water!"

Pii Mai Lao is also a time for festivals, dances and feasts. Says Phonetip, "There is always more than enough food, because that will bring a prosperous year."

In traditional Pii Mai Lao celebrations, a Lao legend, the Nang Sangkhan, is woven into a full pageant where lessons from the story including humility, honoring promises, paying respect to family, and compassion are remembered. The legend states King Kabinlaphom lost a bet to Thao Thammapaala, wherein if Thammapaala could answer a 3-part riddle, King Kabinlaphom would decapitate himself.

Holding true to his word, King Kabinlaphom instructed his seven daughters to place his head in Mt. Sumeru because if his head touched the ground, sky or sea, the world would be destroyed. On the anniversary of their father's death, the daughters went to Mt. Sumeru to cleanse the king's head, lead a procession around the mountain's base to honor the king, and return his head to the mountain to protect the world from catastrophe.

Today, a replica of the king's head is used in processions around temples, villages or sand stupas built to resemble Mount Sumeru. A young woman is chosen from the community to lead the procession and represent the loyal daughters.

BEING UNIQUELY AMERICAN

Phonetip is a co-founder of Kinnaly Lao Traditional Music & Dance Troupe, whose mission is to preserve and promote Lao culture through the arts. (Learn more about it at Kinnaly.net.) Phonetip reflects, "It's a pleasure to have this opportunity: a gift to learn from the older generations and an honor to grow with countless more."

LOOKING AT YOUR OWN FAMILY TRADITIONS

Does your family have traditions and holidays that are important to preserve? How have they been preserved, changed or combined through the years?



Phonetip Sivilay celebrating the Lao New Year.

All photographs courtesy of Phonetip Sivilay

Kick off Lunar New Year in the Chinatown-International District

10 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Opening Celebration – Saturday, Jan. 25
Wing Luke Museum
8th Avenue South and South King Street
wingluke.org

11 a.m.

11:30 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Lion Dance
Lunar New Year Fair with zodiac scavenger hunt, crafts, games and more!

Celebrate Year of the Horse with a private tour. Customized for families, students and other groups, experience New Year traditions through cultural art activities and interactive storytelling. For more info, contact tours@wingluke.org or 206.623-5124 ext 133.

