Festivals

1 **River of Kings**
Celebrating the Chao Phraya River, this festival takes place at night for two weeks in late January/early February. Shows glorifying Thai heroes of the past through song, dance, drama, and animation can be viewed from a floating stadium or luxury river cruisers.

- Chao Phraya River in front of Grand Palace
- Map B4 • (02) 623 5500 extn. 1120–22
- Shows at 7pm and 9:15pm • Adm

2 **Chinese New Year**
This week-long Thai-Chinese celebration in January or February has lion dances in the street, lots of loud firecrackers, and colorful activities in temples. Most Chinese businesses close down for the week.

- Chinatown

3 **Makha Puja**
This annual Buddhist festival, held at the full moon in February or March, celebrates the Buddha’s first sermon to 1,250 disciples, starting the dissemination of the dhamma. Buddhists walk around chedi (stupas) offering lit candles, incense, and lotus.

- Nationwide

4 **Songkran**
Thai New Year, celebrated in mid-April, is the country’s most chaotic and raucous festival. People throw water over each other as a symbolic form of cleansing to usher in the New Year, and even passers-by are not spared. Perhaps for its novelty value, this festival is particularly popular among foreign visitors.

- Nationwide

5 **International Festival of Dance and Music**
Since 1999, Bangkok’s premier arts festival has been held at the Thailand Cultural Centre (see p44) in September and October each year. It features performers from around the world, along with Thailand’s best. The focus of the festival is on opera, ballet, and classical music, though jazz and modern dance are represented as well.

6 **Royal Ploughing Ceremony**
One of Bangkok’s most ancient ceremonies, this annual event, which takes place in early May, is designed to give an auspicious start to the new planting season. Sacred white oxen are used to plough a ritual field in Sanam Luang (see p63) near the Grand Palace (see pp8–9), which is then sown with rice seeds blessed by the king, after which farmers rush to collect the blessed seeds to plant in their own fields.
Top 10 Up-Country Festivals

1. **Chiang Mai Flower Festival**
   During the festival, a parade of marching bands precedes floats bedecked with flower displays. ✯ First weekend, Feb

2. **ASEAN Barred Ground Dove Festival**
   This dove-singing contest attracts competitors to Yala from all over Southeast Asia. ✯ First week, Mar

3. **Pattaya Music Festival**
   Hip-hop, rock, jazz, and easy-listening tunes are performed here by Thai musicians and international acts. ✯ Mar

4. **Poy Sang Long**
   A Shan festival in which ordaining novices, dressed like princes, are paraded round the streets. ✯ First weekend, Apr

5. **Rocket Festival**
   In the northeast, especially in Yasothon, home-made rockets are fired to trigger the start of the monsoons. ✯ May

6. **Hua Hin Jazz Festival**
   This beach festival attracts some big names. ✯ Jun

7. **Phi Ta Khon**
   Locals in Dan Sai dress as spirits for this wild and colorful event. ✯ Jun/Jul

8. **Phuket Vegetarian Festival**
   Bizarre acts of self-mutilation draw in the crowds for nine days. ✯ Oct

9. **Lanna Boat Races**
   Held at the end of the Buddhist Lent with the most exciting races held in Nan Province. ✯ Oct/Nov

10. **Elephant Round-Up**
    Surin, in the northeast, is the venue for this pachyderm extravaganza featuring games and parades. ✯ Nov

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**Loy Krathong**
This festival, usually held in November, offers homage to the goddess of the waters for providing a successful harvest. Beautiful krathong (small decorated floats) are released onto the river at night amid fireworks. ✯ Nationwide

**Wat Saket Fair**
Temple fairs in Thailand are like village fêtes in the West, and this one at Wat Saket and the Golden Mount (see p64), held just before or after Loy Krathong, is a good example. It has a great atmosphere, with music and theater on makeshift stages and kids having fun.

**Bangkok International Film Festival**
Held every year, usually in the autumn, this film festival showcases over 100 films from countries all around the world, with a particular emphasis on emerging film-makers throughout Asia. ✯ www.bangkokfilm.org/

**King’s Birthday**
On December 5, a national holiday and also Fathers’ Day, visitors have an opportunity to witness the reverence the Thai people feel for their monarch. Streets in the city center are decorated, fireworks light up the Grand Palace (see pp8–9), and musicians and singers perform at Sanam Luang (see p63).