



Lao New Year

“Sa bai di Pii Mai!”



Did you know: The middle day of Lao New Year is considered a day that's neither in the past year nor the new year!



A young Jintana ready for New Year

Meet Jintana

Learn about Pi Mai Lao, or Lao New Year's, through the eyes of Jintana Lityouvong, a second generation Lao American whose parents came to the U.S. in 1985.

When she was growing up in the Rainier Beach neighborhood of Seattle, Lao New Year was an important time for her. Every year, her family comes back together to prepare for New Year and to honor traditions with the Lao community.

NEW YEAR'S TRADITIONS

"Sa bai dee Pii Mai" means "Hello, happy New Year" in Lao. You will hear the cheerful greeting exchanged between family members and friends during the three day Lao New Year celebration from April 13 through 16.

Here in Seattle, Jintana's family celebrates Pii Mai Lao on the weekend that closest to April 16. The Friday is the symbolic last day of the year and the

start of three days filled with prayers, food and fun. After moving the family altar to be showcased in her parents' living room, her mother prepares perfumed water made from flower petals and sweet smelling oils. The fragrant water washes away the bad luck from the last year and starts each family member with a clean slate for the New Year.

On Saturday, her family goes to a Lao Buddhist temple. The day is dedicated to honoring elders and young people, who ceremonially rinse the hands of those older than them with perfumed water.

It is also a time of fun and feasting---where you might even get soaked! There are large water fights at Jintana's temple, where water gun battles are an exciting way to ring in the next year. "It's a big party day. At these festivals there is a ton of food—with family booths that sell trinkets, clothing and street foods," Jintana recalls.

Jintana's favorite dish sold at the temple is Lao Coconut Cakes. The little round pancakes remind her of her grandmother, "It's pretty special to me because my grandmother actually made those in Laos and sold them as well on the street—she passed her recipe on to my mom."

Sunday is the symbolic first day to the New Year and begins with Jintana's parents giving food offerings to the Buddhist monks at the temple. After they return, her family sits down for a delicious feast together. Jintana highlights one of her favorites, saying, "One dish that always has to be made during Lao New Year is Kapoon. Kapoon is a pretty popular Lao dish made with coconut, curry and eaten with vermicelli noodles. I learned from my dad that back when he was in Laos, kapoon had to be made completely from scratch. Families all got together to make vermicelli noodles."

"There are not a lot of opportunities to celebrate Lao culture in general; to go to the temples, or be around the larger Lao community here. [New Year] is one time of year that we have to do it, the one time of the year that brings us back," reflects Jintana.

The Story of Nang Sangkhan

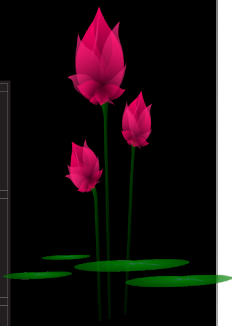
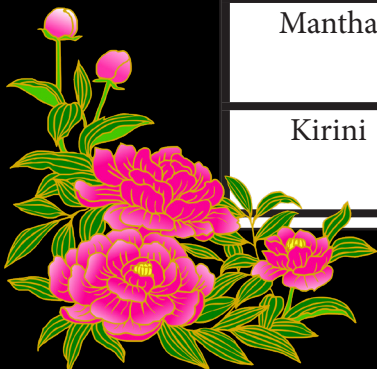
Many of the traditions and stories associated with different holidays are meant to teach children certain values or morals. Pi Mai Lao is no different. Most of the traditions and myths of the holiday are meant to instill important values and morals within children such as the importance of bringing families and communities together, respecting their family members, and the importance of charitable acts.

As a result, one of the most important myths of Pi Mai Lao is about Nang Sangkhan, or the Sangkhan Ladies. The myth that is most often told is that of the Sangkhan Ladies, all seven of them sisters, and how they preserved the world and their father after he passed away as a result of losing a bet.

Before their father died, the ladies were warned, after his passing, if his head were to ever touch the ground, a devastating fire would blaze throughout their kingdom. To prevent this fire, as well as to pay respects to their father, each year one of the sisters tends to their father's body, as well as leading a procession around the base of the mountain where he is kept.

While the story itself is an important part of the myth, for traditions and celebrations, more focus is put on the sisters themselves. With seven sisters, there is one for each day of the week. The day of the week that Pi Mai Lao lands on determines which sister must lead the procession. Additionally, each sister has a flower, food, weapon, jewel, and animal associated with them. Here is a table with just a few of the different symbols associated with the sisters!

Sister's Name	Day of the Week	Flower	Animal
Thungsa	Sunday	Peony	Khrut (A mythical creature that is half bird, half man)
Khorak	Monday	Peap	Tiger
Raksot	Tuesday	Lotus	Pig
Mantha	Wednesday	Champa	Donkey
Kirini	Thursday	Montha	Elephant



KHAO NOM KOK

This is a favorite dish for Jintana's family. These sweet coconut cakes are a delicious treat that are sold during the Lao New Year at Temple Festivals. The Lao pancake pan and mold is important to create the special shape but you could use a Dutch pancake "poffertjes" pan instead.

Khao Nom Kok

Ingredients:

- 2/3 cup Rice flour
- 2 tbsp Sticky rice flour
- 1/4 cup Sugar
- 1 1/2 cups Coconut cream
- 2 thinly sliced Green onions tops
(discard the white bottoms)
- 1/4 cup Water
- 1/2 teaspoon Salt



Directions:

1. In a bowl, mix the rice flour, sticky rice flour, sugar, coconut cream, green onions, water and salt until smooth.
2. Place the pan on the fire, allowing it to thoroughly heat up. Or heat up the Dutch pancake pan on the stove. The pan needs to be hot enough or else the cakes will stick.
3. Grease each round with vegetable oil.
4. Pour the batter into each round. Some people use a teapot or a plastic water bottle to pour the batter. It makes it much easier!
5. Cook for 4-5 minutes. Check to see if the outsides are browned by gently pulling the sides away from the pan with an oiled spoon or small spatula.
6. Once the outsides are golden brown, gently lift the cake and flip it on top of another. Enjoy!

Water fights!

Water has an important role in many parts of the Pi Mai Lao celebration. It is used symbolically to wash away past difficulties from the past year. Jintana's family has a home ritual with perfumed water and her community also has big water gun fights at their Temple. This image of her cousins was taken at their Temple, Wat Lao Dhammacetiaram in Othello Washington, as they gear up to have a water fight. Pi Mai Lao falls during some of the hottest seasons in Laos and the water fights are a welcome break from the hot weather and to cool down while letting off some steam. Of course it is a bit cooler during April in Washington but that doesn't stop folks from having fun!

Watch [this video](#) to see the other ways that water is used to celebrate Pi Mai Lao!



Lao Traditional Dance



Just like many other holidays dance plays an important role in Lao celebrations! [Watch this video of oy pon pi mai](#), a special kind of dance performed to help bless the new year.

Watch the dancers' hands as they dance! The position and shape of their hands are meant to represent different stages of growth and different emotions.

Vocabulary

Morals - values that teach us how we should live our lives

Offerings- An object, promise or contribution that is given. In Jintana's story and in many other religious communities, it is usually given with faith to the religious deity or organization.

Pi Mai Lao - The name for Lao New Year that often falls in the middle of April

Symbolic - Using an object, word, or action to represent a larger idea

Temple- A building that is used for religious ceremony, community gathering and for worship.