

# CAMBODIAN

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE – **KHMER**. Other languages spoken - Vietnamese, Northern Khmer, Thai, French

## RELIGIOUS BELIEFS – **THERAVADA BUDDHISM**

The Cambodian older people like to participate in religious festivals. These include **Pchum Ben**, an event which happens in September. Cambodian Buddhists make offerings and pay tribute to their deceased ancestors. They prepare food and offer it to the monks at the temples.

Another important event is the **Cambodian New Year** which occurs from the 13th to the 15th of April in keeping with the lunar calendar. In Australia they may change the dates so as to celebrate on the weekend.

**Thngai Seila** – These are weekly religious days marked on the calendar. On these days, the Cambodian people make visits to the temple in the morning to pray and learn about Buddhist doctrine. As Offerings they take cooked food to the temple.

**Thngai Penh Baur** – These are moon days, the Cambodian people believe that these days are auspicious times and they visit the temple to pray. They also offer cooked food to the monks on these days.

Death is not viewed with the great outpouring of grief common to Western society; it is viewed as the end of one life and as the beginning of another that one hope will be better.

Older Cambodian people like –

- Listening to traditional or spiritual music.
  - Watching traditional dancing.
  - Watching Thai movies/Cambodian comedy.
  - Practising meditation.
  - Going to the temple to pray.
  - Outings
  - Cooking
  - Playing cards/bingo (Day care group).
- \* (above information was documented by Catherine McDonald)

## Cambodian Cultural Profile

### 1.) How do Cambodians celebrate the New Year?

Houses are thoroughly cleaned to rid them of evil spirits. New clothes and clean house symbolize a new beginning.

\*First day is the day of entry and marks the arrival of the New Angel, Thevada.

People prepare to welcome the New Angel with five candles, five incense holders, flowers, fruit and a bowl of perfumed water. These are placed on the table in front of their house. Families pray for happiness, health and good crops.

\*Second day- families visit the temple, wear their new clothes and bring food to the monks to get blessed. In the evening the community builds a sand hill, preferably near a Budhi tree. The Budhi tree has a special significance because it was under such

a tree that Buddha slept, meditated and achieved enlightenment. The grains of sand are believed to be equal to one's health and happiness. Children show respect and gratitude by giving their elders gifts of clothes, baked goods and money. Gifts are given to servants and the poor. After completing their good deeds, the children play traditional games, dance and sing at the Temple. The sand mountain continues to be added to.

**\*Third day:**

In the morning, we go to the temple to perform the ceremony of the sand hill and get blessed.

In the evening, to complete the New Year festival, we perform the last ceremony, called as "Pithi Srang Preah", which means giving a special bath or a special shower to Buddha statues, elders, parents and grandparents to apologize for any mistake we have done to them and gratify them. Every one must have a wonderful time during this ceremony because it is a great opportunity for everyone, young and old, man and woman to have much fun by plashing water on each other.

**2.) Where do the people like to go for outings?**

People like to go anywhere for outings, picnic, sightseeing, temples, national parks, seashore etc.

**3.) Which card games do they like to play?**

6 card games or Black Jack

**4.) How do the people like to be greeted? eg - handshake, hug, kiss, bow.**

**Some of the European Cultures hug, kiss & like alot of physical contact.**

In general people like to greet each other with hands joined together as in a prayer position, slightly bow their head and say "sompeah"

Normally sampeah is said during initial introductions, or if people have not seen each other for a long time, but it is not necessary to som-peah to service providers, i.e. waiters and taxi drivers.

Also it is not necessary to sompeah every time you meet a friend, or co-worker. A simple wave or hello is fine.

The younger person should be the first to bow, but it is considered polite for the older person to respond back.

Physical contact may be inappropriate, especially between man and woman.

Hugging is only when you meet a close family or friend or if people have not seen each other for a long time but not kissing.

However, nowadays some people or the younger generation are adapted to the Western style such as shaking hands, hugging and kissing.

**\* NOTE:**

**Buddhist monks are not allowed to touch females at all and also try to avoid eye contact while talking.**

**5.) What is appropriate for Cambodian older people? If you were walking with them would you link arms, hold hands etc.**

For Cambodian older people there is no problem with linking arms or holding hands as long as it is convenient for both sides.