

Water Wars: *Pee Mai Lao*

Pee Mai is the Lao New Year which is celebrated by an “officially” three day long water nationwide water fight. In practice it’s such a good thing people start a few days early and keep it going few days later. If you’re in the country, you’re in the water fight, and more than likely you will get soaked. Splashing water on someone is supposed to bring them good luck in the New Year.

Conveniently this occurs during the hottest month of the year and marks the end of

the dry season, so no one is too upset at the prospect of wearing around wet cloths. If you’re out on the street you pretty much expect to get wet. I arrived in Pakse the largest city in the south of Laos in the early afternoon on the first official day of *Pee Mai*. I packed my camera into my waterproof dry-bag day pack and set out to experience *Pee Mai* with the locals. It’s not too difficult to find a party during *Pee Mai*. There is music blaring from every street corner with people dancing and drinking as they toss water on each other and anyone passing by. Taking a good natured dowsing often earns you a beer and the invitation to join in ambushing others. So I took up a couple offers and hung out on a couple of street corners throwing water and drinking beer. There were a number of tucks filled with people and buckets of water that made there way through the city. These would often bring on the fiercest water battles. When a group of people riding in a truck motioned me to get in I jumped at the opportunity. It turned out that these trucks were making the rounds to the various temples where everyone would pile out and splash some yellow flower infused water on Buddha images, maybe get a blessing and string bracelet from a monk and then it was back in the truck to resume the water war. As time passed, pelting other passing trucks and people on the street with water filled plastic bags and buckets of water became the primary purpose and the temples became little more than refueling stops to replenish our water. It was a certainly a festive atmosphere, one of the kids played the buckets like a set of drums providing a cadence for the singing of



Truck getting dowsed with water, Pakse.



Kids in water fight, Paam.

the “*Pee Mai* song” as they called it, which everyone would break into spontaneously. I didn’t get many pictures of the truck ride since riding the back of a truck is pretty much like walking around with a bull’s eye on your forehead; I kept my camera safely in the dry-bag.

The second day of *Pee Mai* I took the same approach as the first, dress to get wet, and head out to find a party. It wasn’t

long before I was invited to join a group dancing, drinking, and throwing water on the street. I ended up spending almost the whole day with them eating, drinking, dancing, and mostly getting drenched. On the third day I moved on to a different city to see what was happening in the smaller town of Champasak, a day that ended up pretty much like the second with different people in a different town. Somehow drinking and throwing water at people just doesn’t get old. I think *Pee Mai* might be one of the most fun holidays I’ve ever celebrated.



Pouring water on Buddha images, Pakse.



Throwing water on Buddha images, Pakse.



Me *Pee Pai*-ed out, Pakse.



Kids with water guns, Pakse.



Water fight on the banks of the Mekong, Pakse.



Looking for a target, Pakse.



Pouring beer, Pakse.



Guy with water gun, Pakse.



Throwing water, Pakse.



Girl with water gun, Pakse.