



Newsletter : March 2010

Home
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**The Dipterocarpaceae tree – one of the tallest trees on earth**

As a family of plants, the Dipterocarpaceae tree or called "Pong" in Thailand may perhaps hold the distinction of being the most well known trees in the tropics. This famed family of trees stands tall in some of the grandest forest formations the earth has ever witnessed.



Many are large forest emergent species, typically reaching heights of 40-70 m tall, some even over 80 m. Dipterocarp tend to have smooth, straight trunks raising to great heights without side branches or forks until the canopy is reached. The base of the tree is often buttressed. A possibly key to the long lives of individual trees is the presence in all plant parts of an oily aromatic resin that presumably adds the plant in defense against attack from fungi, bacteria and animals.



Impressive as they are, trees of this stature are between 150-300 years old. Currently the Dipterocarp predominate the international tropical timber market, and therefore play an important role in the economy of many of the Southeast Asian countries.

At present, underestimated and unrestricted exploitation has encouraged excessive harvesting of Dipterocarp and together with modern technologies and economics, has finally endangered the future of Dipterocarp forests.

However, there are still a lot of Dipterocarp trees in the Khao Sok area. The national park should ensure the survival of these trees for the upcoming centuries.



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**Songkran festival**

The Songkran festival is celebrated in Thailand as the traditional New Year's Day from 13 to 15 April. It coincides with the New Year of many calendars of South and Southeast Asia. The date of the festival was originally set by astrological calculation, but it is now fixed. Songkran falls in the hottest time of the year in Thailand, at the end of the dry season. Until 1888 the Thai New Year was the beginning of the year in Thailand; thereafter 1 April was used until 1940. 1 January is now the beginning of the year.



The most obvious celebration of Songkran is the throwing of water. People roam the streets with containers of water or water guns (sometimes mixed with mentholated talc), or post themselves at the side of roads with a garden hose and drench each other and passersby. This, however, was not always the main activity of this festival. Songkran was traditionally a time to visit and pay respects to elders, including family members, friends and neighbors.



Besides the throwing of water, people celebrating Songkran may also go to a wat (Buddhist monastery) to pray and give food to monks. They may also cleanse Buddha images from household shrines as well as Buddha images at monasteries by gently pouring water mixed with a Thai fragrance over them. It is believed that doing this will bring good luck and prosperity for the New Year. In many cities, such as Chiang Mai, the Buddha images from all of the city's important monasteries are paraded through the streets so that people can toss water at them, ritually 'bathing' the images, as they pass by on ornately decorated floats. In northern Thailand, people may also carry handfuls of sand to their neighborhood monastery in order to recompense the dirt that they have carried away on their feet during the rest of the year. The sand is then sculpted into stupa-shaped piles and decorated with colorful flags.

Some people make New Year resolutions - to refrain from bad behavior, or to do good things. Songkran is a time for cleaning and renewal. Besides washing household Buddha images, many Thais also take this opportunity to give their home a thorough cleaning. Nowadays, the emphasis is on fun and water-throwing rather than on the festival's spiritual and religious aspects, which sometimes prompts complaints from traditionalists. The water is meant as a symbol of washing all of the bad away and is sometimes filled with fragrant herbs. So, if preparing for a holiday to Thailand this April, pack a rain coat...no one escapes on Songkran!

**'Thailand's First Luxury Tented Camp in the Rainforest'**  
Elephant Hills operates 2 - 4 day Jungle adventures in the Khao Sok National Park, Surat Thani - Thailand.

For information regarding tours, bookings or our rates for travel agents please e-mail: [info@elephant-hills.com](mailto:info@elephant-hills.com)

**GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT NEWS**

**Earth Hour heads into record territory**  
Gland, Switzerland - New records are being achieved for Earth Hour with more countries now signed up for the event than for last year's globe circling lights out for climate action. Organisers are now active in 92 countries, compared to a final participation figure of 88 countries in 2009 - with still just over two weeks to go.....[click here](#)

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Interesting Links : For more information regarding Khao Sok National park, its geography and species diversity ... [click here](#)



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