



## Candle Festival Ubon Ratchanthani

There are many ceremonies and festivals in Thailand and during your time here you will have the opportunity to see some of them. Most of these are based on the lunar calendar and have been a part of Thai culture for centuries. Many of these age old traditions are to be found in the provinces, though there are some still to be found in Bangkok.

Recently, I was fortunate enough to attend the Candle Festival at Ubon Ratchanthani. In true Thai style this is a colourful event, full of energy and with the locals having sanook (a good time).

This is one of the annual celebrations that is a part of the Buddhist calendar and is held on the day after the full moon of the eighth lunar month. This is the day of Khao Pansa. In Thai this means 'to enter the rainy season', and lasts three months. It is a time when monks are confined to their monasteries and do not travel or leave the temple for any length of time.

This custom dates back to the early days of Buddhism when monks walked the countryside. It was difficult for them to travel during the rainy season through swollen rivers and swamps and by not traveling they would be protecting the freshly planted rice seedlings and small creatures that live in the paddy fields.

During this time monks would retreat for study, meditation and to teach newly ordained monks. Today in Thailand many young men will enter the monk hood for the duration of the rainy season.

Leading up to Khao Pansa people make merit by giving items to the monks that they will need during this period of retreat. Ceremonies are held at temples to present candles that are supposed to remain lit for the three-month period.

For weeks and months ahead, extremely large candles made of beeswax are carved with



Ubon Ratchathani in northeast Thailand has an elaborate procession of floats with carved candles and sculptures relating to stories from the Buddha's life, legends and tales with mythological figures. These very large floats are a sight to behold and show how creative the carvers are. There is fierce competition between the groups participating in the candle festival.



Intermixed with this procession of floats are bands on trucks with musicians playing both modern and traditional instruments. They have the largest speakers possible, so you can imagine the volume of the music. Following each band are groups of beautifully attired girls, young women and sometimes men. Each group wearing the same colourful textiles dance in a coordinated and choreographed movement.



This is an occasion well worth a visit. So if you are in Thailand this time next year I would highly recommend you visit Ubon Ratchathani.

By Lynda O'Callaghan