

# Cambodian New Year

In Cambodia Coul Chnam Tmey, which means “entering the new year,” is celebrated over a three or four day period beginning the 12th, 13th or 14th of April. Oral tradition holds that prior to the 13th century, the new year was celebrated the first month in the lunar calendar, in November or December. This period coincides with the harvest of the first rice crop and planting of the second crop and is an extremely busy time for Khmer farmers. It’s believed one of the kings of the 12th century used the Indian solar calendar to fix a new date in April. The Bayon Temple (pictured on the right) built by Jayavarman VII in the 12th century is traditionally thought of as a symbol of the New Year and in fact is called the “New Year temple” by some in the community.

Unlike other celebrations in Cambodia, New Year is considered a national holiday, and is not centered on a Buddhist observance. Although people set up altars in their homes, visit the temple, and ritually wash the Buddha statue as part of the observances, it is seen more as a social event; a time to gather with family and friends; to relax, play, and gamble a little.

