

Title:

Ko Chang, Thailand - Water Festival of Loi Kathong

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Summary:

Thailand is a land of enchanting and exotic tastes for foreign visitors as I was to learn when I experienced the Water Festival of Loi Kathong on the island of Ko Chang.

Keywords:

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Article Body:

Thailand is a land of enchanting and exotic tastes for foreign visitors as I was to learn when I experienced the Water Festival of Loi Kathong on the island of Ko Chang.

Ko Chang

In October 2003, the travel bug seriously bit me. The symptoms led me to sell my business, pack a small backpack with necessary items and roll into Los Angeles International Airport with a major credit card and an attitude. A few days later, I was in Thailand and headed for the island of Ko Chang, located close to the border with Cambodia in the Gulf of Thailand.

Ko Chang is a heavily forested island with little towns full of beach huts. This is what I was exactly what I was after. Spending days lounging in the sun and contemplating my navel. Unfortunately, I soon experienced the local bacteria, which was not what I was after.

Since I had rented my beach hut for a week with payment in advance, the family running the place looked me upon favorably. They took pity on me and I was soon growing fat on Tom Yom Kung and other soups and curries. After four days, I had finally kicked the bug and felt halfway human. This was good news as it was the night of the full moon water festival.

I had heard of full moon festivals in Thailand. For hard partying tourists, this was apparently the night the big beach parties happened. In Ko Chang, it was a

little different as the night was tailored to the actual Thais, not tourist.

The Loi Kathong Festival happens every full moon. Offerings are given to appease the water spirits. These offerings come in the form of banana leaf bowls with flowers, fruit, candles and incense. The candles and incense are lit and everyone heads down the beach and starts putting them in the water. It is one of the more amazing light shows you will ever see and beats Las Vegas hands down. Thousands, and I mean thousands, of little lights bobbing on the surface of the smooth ocean.

After the bowls comes one of the most visually amazing things I've ever seen. Everyone is familiar with the paper lanterns used in Asia. Typically, they come in the form of a rectangle form with a bamboo or light wire frame. Very popular with college students since they are cheap and look better than a bare light bulb.

For the festival, Thais would take these paper lanterns and close off the top. They would then affix a small thin paper plate to the bottom with a candle on it. Light the candle, wait for the heat to do its work and they had an instant hot air balloon. Once the lanterns could float, you simply let go and off they slowly went over the ocean. It was a sight to see as there were thousands of them floating over the water.

As the festival wound down, the ocean had been transformed. The air was full of gracefully floating lanterns while the water itself was dotted with slowly bobbing points of light.

If you intend to travel to Thailand, make sure you schedule your trip around a full moon. It is a scene you'll never forget.