

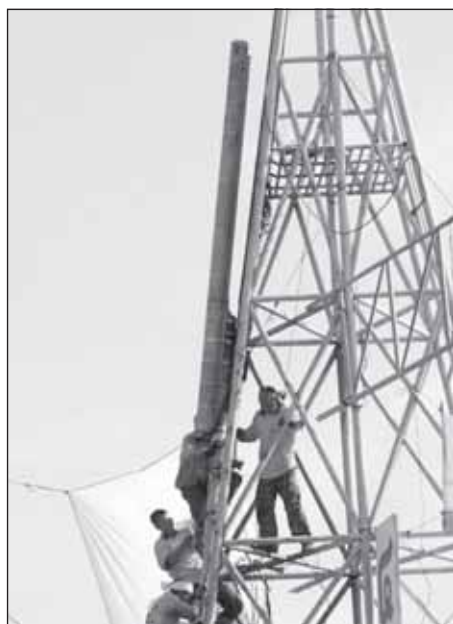


YASOTHON ROCKET FESTIVAL



The **Rocket Festival** (*Bun Bangfai*) was originally an ancient Lao festival. It takes place in a number of locations both in Laos and Esarn (North-east Thailand) and is most famously celebrated in the Yasothon region of Esarn. It is always held in May. Originating in pre-Buddhist times, it is a fertility rite held to celebrate and to encourage the coming of the rainy season. As such, it is a most sexual and bawdy festival. Coming immediately before the planting season, the festival offers a last chance to relax before work gets underway.

From 2005, the Yasothon version of the festival spread over three weekend



sphere, dirty humour is widespread. A fair is held on Saturday evening, involving cross-dressing and large quantities of alcohol. Among the unique beverages to be found are "Lao Whiskey" known as "Lao Lao" and Sato, brewed rice-alcohol similar to Japanese sake.

The rockets are launched on the Sunday. The winners of the competition are those whose rocket flies the longest.

While the Thai language word for rocket is 'jaruat', 'Bang Fai' is the name used uniquely for the rockets of the Rocket Festival.

While the traditional style of Bang Fai is constructed of bamboo, many of the contemporary rockets are constructed of PVC piping, with long bamboo tails.

The rockets come in various sizes: The small Bang Fai, or 'Noi', the medium-sized Bang Fai, or 'Meun' and the largest Bang Fai, the 'Lan'.

The 'Lan' rockets can be 9 metres long and carry up to 120 kg of gunpowder. The larger rockets routinely reach high altitudes and travel dozens of kilometers down range. While popular and entertaining, the festival is also dangerous, with spectators occasionally being injured or even killed by the rockets. On May 10th, 1999, a *Lan* 120 kg rocket exploded 50 meters above ground, just two seconds after launch, killing five people and wounding eleven.

The Rocket Festival in Yasothon Province is spectacular and provides a tremendous opportunity to experience Esarn-style festive fun.



days in the middle of May. After preliminary events on Friday (*Wan Sook Dip*), on Saturday the home-made, decorated rockets are paraded through the town.

Owing to the fertility rite origins of the festival, parade ornaments and floats often sport phallic symbols and imagery. Amid the festive atmo-

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FARANG PLACES IN ESARN

When you go "up-country" (to another province) in Thailand it is convenient to know the places where farangs (foreigners) meet and exchange information about that area of Thailand

"Pattaya People Weekly" list here some of these places. Please do not hesitate to inform us of any other places and any changes.

Please contact Email: dragonpattaya@yahoo.co.uk.

Khon Kaen:

BEER HOUSE

Michael D. LaSpina 98/12 Soi 5 Perisagica Khon Kaen 40000
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0-8971 10325
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www.leoskhonkaen.com
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Korat:

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08-9252-7129

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