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MAGHA PUJA

Māgha Pūjā (also written as **Makha Bucha Day**) is the second most important [Buddhist festival](#),^[1] celebrated on the full moon day of [the third lunar month](#)^[6] in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Sri Lanka and on the full moon day of [Tabaung](#) in Myanmar. It celebrates a gathering that was held between the Buddha and 1,250 of his first [disciples](#), which, according to tradition, preceded the custom of periodic recitation of [discipline by monks](#). On the day, Buddhists celebrate the creation of an ideal and exemplary community, which is why it is sometimes called **Saṅgha Day**, the [Saṅgha](#) referring to the Buddhist community, and for some Buddhist schools this is specifically the monastic community.^{[7][11]} In Thailand,

the [Pāli](#) term **Māgha-pūraṇamī** is also used for the celebration, meaning 'to honor on the full moon of the third lunar month'.^[8] Finally, some authors referred to the day as the **Buddhist All Saints Day**.^{[9][10]}

In pre-modern times, Māgha Pūjā has been celebrated by some Southeast Asian communities. But it became widely popular in the modern period, when it was instituted in Thailand by [King Rama IV](#) in the mid-19th century. From Thailand, it spread to other South and Southeast Asian countries. Presently, it is a public holiday in some of these countries. It is an occasion when Buddhists go to the temple to perform [merit-making](#) activities, such as [alms giving](#), meditation and listening to teachings. It has been proposed in Thailand as a more spiritual alternative to the celebration of [Valentine's Day](#).

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HISTORY

Little is known on how traditional Buddhist societies celebrated this event in pre-modern times, but Māgha Pūjā was recognized and celebrated in [Lan Na](#), [Lan Xang](#) and [Northeastern Thailand](#). Practices of worship probably varied a lot.^[24] The first known instance in modern times was during the reign of the Thai king [Rama IV](#) (1804–68) who instituted it as a ceremony in 1851.^[25] He reasoned that the Māgha Pūjā "... was an important gathering, a miracle in Buddhism. Wise and knowledgeable people have therefore used this opportunity to honour the Buddha and the 1,250 [arahants](#),

which is a foundation of [faith](#) and a [sense of urgency](#)".^[26] He first held it in [Temple of the Emerald Buddha](#), in the palace only. In the evening, 31 monks from the temples [Wat Bowonniwet Vihara](#) and [Wat Ratchapradit](#) would recite the *Ovādapātimokkha*, lit lanterns around the [ubosot](#) (ordination hall), and give a sermon about the same *Ovādapātimokkha* in the Pāli and Thai languages. The King or his representative would join the yearly ceremony.^[27] A recitation text used for this occasion is attributed to Rama IV.^[11] As part of an enduring effort to centralize and regularize Thai Buddhism, Rama IV's successor [Rama V](#) (1853–1910) expanded the practice and organized it as a national celebration in the Temple of the Emerald Buddha.^[28] In 1913, he officially established it as a public holiday,^[29] as he started to organize the ceremonies in other places than the palace.^[26] By 1937, the ceremony was widely held and observed in Thailand, but by 1957, it had fallen out of usage. [Supreme Patriarch](#)-to-be [Plod Kittisobhano](#) [\[th\]](#) helped to revive it.^[30] From Thailand, the practice spread to neighboring countries which have a majority of [Theravāda](#) Buddhists.