

Cambodian weddings traditionally consisted of ceremonies and celebrations lasting three days and three nights. Three is considered to be an especially auspicious number by Cambodians because of its association with the "three jewels" of Buddhism: the Buddha, the Sangha (brotherhood of monks), and the Dhamma (the Buddha's teachings). Due to the demands of modern day life however, today, both in Cambodia and overseas, all the following wedding ceremonies are usually completed in just one day.

PRESENTATION OF DOWRY

Cambodian weddings begin with the groom and his family traveling to the bride's home bearing gifts to the bride's family as dowry. Family members and friends are introduced, and wedding rings exchanged. Three traditional songs accompany the presentation of dowry:

Neay Pream He Kaun Kamlas (Arrival of the Groom)

A song telling the story of the groom and his family's journey to the bride's house bearing meats, fruits, pastries, drinks, and desserts of every variety to be presented on the wedding day.

Chambak Rouy (Presenting the Dowry)

A dialogue between the matchmakers, parents, relatives, and friends of the bride and groom in which the groom's family and friends officially present the dowry gifts to the bride's family.

Pak Paeuk Pisa Sla (Inviting the Elders to Chew Betel Nut)

Presentation of the betel nut to the bride and groom's elders. In turn, parents of both the bride and groom ask for blessings and well-wishes for their children.

TEA CEREMONY

A tradition practiced by Cambodians of Chinese descent in which the bride and groom offer tea to the spirits of their ancestors.

HAIR CUTTING CEREMONY

To prepare the bride and groom for their life as a married couple, their hair is symbolically cut, representing a fresh start to their new relationship together as husband and wife. The master of ceremony performs the first symbolic hair cut and wishes the couple happiness, prosperity, and longevity. The bride and groom's parents, relatives, and friends then take turn to symbolically cut the bride and groom's hair and give them blessings and well-wishes. (In the old days, the bride and groom's hair were really cut during this ceremony, but in modern times it is only done symbolically.) Two songs accompany this ceremony:

Sarika Keiv Vong (The Beautiful Cardinal Bird)

The bride's beauty is extolled and compared to that of the beautiful cardinal bird.

Trapeang Peiy (The Village Pond)

This song describes a pond with clear water where the bride was brought to take her bath. It also symbolizes the bride and groom working together in beginning their new life as wife and husband.

PAIRING CEREMONY

In this final and most memorable stage of the wedding, family members and friends tie the bride and groom's left and right wrists with blessing strings. The praises and well-wishes of happiness, good health, success, prosperity, and long-lasting love are acknowledged and witnessed by the loud sound of the gong and joyful cheer. The ceremony concludes with a shower of palm flowers thrown over the new couple. Four songs accompany this ceremony:

Phat Cheay

A melody inviting the bride, accompanied by her bridesmaids, to the pairing ceremony. A distinguished female relative leads the bride into the room.

Kang Saeuy

A melody accompanying the offering of gifts to the ancestor spirits and asking for their blessings.

Bangvel Po Pil (Seven Rotations)

Only married couples are permitted to sit around the bride and groom as the sacred flame is rotated seven times around the new couple. The flame of the pure bee-wax candle represents anger, which the couple should avoid as it can disrupt the marriage relationship. The smoke of the flame, however, is sacred enough to protect them from all evils if they are sincerely committed to each other. Family members who receive the candle motion their hands over the flame to guide the smoke of the sacred flame over the bride and groom.

Bay Khon Chang Dai (Tying the Wrists)

While the bride and groom's wrists are tied with the blessing strings, the following song is sung: "We tie, we tie three strings to each wrist of our children. We wish for true happiness and success to this couple, who will always be together like wet grass seeds. We tie your left wrist to make you remember your parents. We tie your right wrist to make you carry on the family lineage and traditions."