

Beat: Travel

## Phuket's Vegetarian Festival - not for the faint hearted

### Vegetarian Festival Thailand

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**USPA NEWS** - Like every year the Vegetarian Festival takes place in the 9th month of the Chinese lunar calendar. For the first time in the history of the event this year's festival will take place twice because there are two 9th lunar months in the Chinese lunar calendar.

The festival takes place from 23-09 to 02-10 and the second time from 24-10 to 01-11-2014.

The vegetarian festival honors Chinese gods and is thought to have been celebrated in Phuket since 1825 because the island has a considerable ethnic Chinese population. The nine-day event is a spectacular and bloody festival of Chinese Taoist processions in which participants display acts of self-mutilation and fire walks can be watched. Walking on fire and blade-ladder climbing at the temples is one of the heights of religious devotion.

From very early in the morning, worshipers at the shrine enter a trance and have their cheeks pierced with the most peculiar objects like parasols, swords and petrol pumps. Their creativity doesn't seem to know any limits. In the last few years, more and more women seem to participate parading through town with weird items stuck through their cheeks.

The history of the vegetarian festival in Phuket is said to have originated in the early- nineteenth century when a group of Chinese opera performers came to the island to entertain the Chinese tin mine workers and their families. During this Chinese ninth lunar month, the miners and performers were hit by a fatal disease, presumably malaria causing the death of many.

The performers realized that they had forgotten to pay homage to the Nine Emperor Gods in the first nine days of the month. Therefore they decided that for nine days they would adhere to a strict vegetarian diet and pray to the Nine Emperor Gods. They refrained from drinking alcohol, from telling lies, quarreling and killing to ensure purification of the mind and body. The epidemic died away and ever since the Vegetarian Festival is celebrated throughout Thailand, but mainly in Phuket with its large Thai-Chinese population.

Participating mediums believe they become possessed by spirits and therefore don't feel any pain or lose blood when they are in trance and skewer their bodies and faces. Throughout the parade, fireworks are let off and drums beaten as loud as possible. With these rituals they seek to rid the area of evil spirits and bring good fortune to their families and local communities.

The 2014 Vegetarian Festival has started with all the ceremonies and events under way and is being followed as always. The second festival is expected to see the rituals being followed, but probably with less celebrations.

If you want to see more photos of the Phuket Vegetarian Festival go here: <http://www.ilsegibson.com/vegetarian-festival-phuket-gallery.html>

#### Article online:

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-2748/phukets-vegetarian-festival-not-for-the-faint-hearted.html>

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