

Khmer Pryde!

By [LesbeAsian](#) on May 2nd, 2012 | 8:28 am



The Kingdom's annual Pride originated with an evening party in 2004, but since 2009 has become a week-long celebration of diversity, respect and unity. Besides extending the length of the party, organisers Rainbow Community Kampuchea and Cambodian Pride Committee have broadened the focus to include greater participation of lesbians, and added film and art festivals as well as a Buddhist blessing ceremony. 7Days asked RoCK organiser Srorn Srun for a peek at what's in store at this year's event, which kicks off on May 12.

Is this the first ASEAN Pride week?

Yes, this is the first time in Cambodia that we will involve our ASEAN LGBTIQ friends and hopefully some friends from other Asian countries like China, India and Korea. There was a caucus in Jakarta last year for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex individuals that aimed to strengthen dialogue within Southeast Asia and link groups here with those globally.

Can you tell us what else is new this year?

We'll be livelier, brighter and a bit bigger. The film screenings are expanding to three venues and three galleries will be showing art from around the region. We've also dubbed a documentary about LGBT activism in China – Queer China, Comrade China – into Khmer. We think this will have a lot of resonance here. We're also adding more advocacy workshops including one in which we discuss how to better work with the media.

Is there a lot of misinformation in the media?

Sure, even in the Phnom Penh Post. There was a very misleading article about Cambodian lesbians in Lift a few months ago. The Khmer-language version was a bit hysterical. On CTN TV, there was comedy group who very negatively portrayed transgender men to women. They introduced small boys behaving like girls, but they ended the comedy show with the three transgender people changing to straight men. They married women and had children, as though [the producers] thought being transgendered was not natural. They advised the audience to stop behaving like transgendered people or they would reduce human resources.

Can you tell us a bit about RoCK?

RoCK is a voluntary group of LGBT activists and is a core organiser of Pride. It has many other activities throughout the year, which complement and support the annual Pride Festival. RoCK was founded in September 2009 after a very inspiring and successful Pride Week. We decided to extend our activities beyond the capital. We're a grassroots advocacy group that supports LGBT people around the country. We also conduct awareness raising campaigns at universities and assist individuals and families whose rights are violated.

Last year saw the first Buddhist blessing ceremony. Are you looking forward to repeating it this year?

The blessing ceremony kicks off our community day on Sunday, May 20. We go to a pagoda and receive blessings from monks, LGBT people, their families, friends and other supporters. Last year it resonated very deeply. One of the monks reminded everyone that they were who they were born to be. It was a very powerful message. It's definitely a message worth repeating, for all people.

And the parties?

The number of bars and nightclubs hosting parties is expanding. Besides Blue Chili, Rainbow Bar and Pontoon, more businesses are joining, including The Local bar and the Empire. NGOs who work on HIV/AIDS issues with men who have sex with men will also be holding events.

Anything else you are aiming for?

May 17 is International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia so that will be the advocacy peak. We'll also be working with groups from other countries to map out a regional advocacy strategy on ensuring the ASEAN Declaration on Human Rights recognises and protects people of different sexual orientation and identity. This protection is in danger of being erased from the draft.

This piece was originally published at [LesbeAsian](#).