Soaking up local culture
By Dr. Chuck Kelley

Every day, at Outrigger resorts across the Pacific and Indian oceans, our hosts provide guests with unforgettable hospitality and introduce them in many ways, large and small, to the local culture. Proudly sharing authentic local hospitality is not only an expression of the reverence for the host-guest-place relationship that is rooted in our values, we have found that it also enriches guests’ time with us and makes it even more memorable.

The person-to-person sharing of local traditions, culture, music, history, cuisine and arts helps open travelers’ eyes to the diversity of the world and is the foundation of our business. Each good experience builds a further desire to leave home again, discover the world’s fascinating cultures and share time with loved ones.

Because our properties now span eight time zones and many cultures it is impossible to list even a fraction of all the amazing experiences we offer our guests.

As you read Rory Campbell’s story (right) about Outrigger Laguna Phuket Beach Resort’s wet and wild celebration of Thailand’s aptly named Songkran Water Festival, consider what a unique opportunity we have here at Outrigger, using our values as a guide to caring for each other, for our guests and for the places to which we welcome travelers.
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The Songkran Festival, April 13-15, coincides with the New Year of many South and Southeast Asian calendars. The festival is in keeping with the Buddhist/Hindu solar calendar. Similar Buddhist water festivals are held simultaneously in Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar. Traditionally, Songkran in Thailand was the time of year when the rice harvest was in and farmers had to wait for the rains to begin in order to plant their new crop.

For some, Songkran is a period of reflection and familial expressions of respect to elders. But for others – most people – it’s the perfect time to get merry, hit the streets and throw lots of water around.

The water pouring is meant to symbolize the washing away of all sins and ill thoughts, so the water is sometimes filled with fragrant herbs. Traditionally, Thais would politely pour a bowl of water on members of the family, their close friends and neighbors.

As Songkran has taken on a more festive note in the last few decades, the bowl has become a bucket, garden hose or water gun. The spirit of holiday merriment is shared among local residents and tourists alike.

To honor the Thai New Year in Phuket, Outrigger hosts gave alms to nine Buddhist monks from a local temple and held a water pouring ceremony (blessing) at the upper swimming pool in the morning. Around 50 guests and 40 hosts attended. Later we held a long drum parade and “History of Songkran” celebration at the resort beachfront. Of course there were fun water games including water Thai boxing, music and dancing on the beach.

It’s a time when the cares of the old year are forgotten and everyone embraces the joy of the new.

Happy New Year – or as we say in Thailand, “Sawasdee Phi My.”

SONGKRAN CELEBRATED AT THE OUTRIGGER LAGUNA PHUKET RESORT AND VILLAS

Above: “Song Nam Phra” (bathing the Buddha image) for hosts and guests to pour scented water on the hands of the Buddha to wash away the bad actions of the past year and to make a wish for the new year, asking for good fortune, health, wealth or whatever is desired.

Left: Lunch offering to monks to receive blessings.

Below: Hosts and guests offer food to the monks.