

Thailand celebrates Songkran with first splashes since 2019

BANGKOK (AP) — Hordes of revellers toted colorful water guns when Thailand kicked off its exuberant three-day Songkran festival at full blast for the first time since 2019.

The New Year celebration’s signature water fighting — a major draw for tourists — had been banned or discouraged since 2020 to curb the spread of the coronavirus, and its full-scale return was widely promoted. In Bangkok alone, there were 40 designated spots this year for public water splashing, including the touristy Khao San Road where vendors hawked food, clothes, and water-fighting gear in the scorching heat.

The festival, which is also celebrated in neighboring Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos, falls at the hottest time of the year when temperatures can creep above 104° Fahrenheit.

While many tourists and locals congregate in the capital, millions of workers head home to rural provinces to see family and celebrate by cleansing images of the Buddha for luck, throwing



MAKING A SPLASH. A family celebrates the Songkran festival in Prachinburi Province, east of Bangkok, on April 13, 2023. Hordes of revellers toted colorful water guns as Thailand kicked off its exuberant three-day Songkran festival at full blast for the first time since 2019, hoping to boost tourism after the industry was devastated by the coronavirus pandemic. (AP Photo/Wason Wanichakorn)

projected this year’s Songkran festival would help generate more than 18 billion baht (\$530 million) in revenue and bring in more than 300,000 international travellers for the holiday week — a 525% increase over the same period in 2022, but just 58% of 2019’s number from before the COVID-19 pandemic began.

Although the country gradually eased up travel restrictions before fully reopening in October, local entrepreneurs remain concerned about the pace of the recovery.

Thailand received about 40 million international visitors in 2019. That number decreased sharply to 6.7 million in 2020 and fewer than 500,000 in 2021, according to data from the Ministry of Tourism and Sports.

water on each other, and washing the hands and feet of elders to pay respect and ask for a blessing.

Police geared up for the “Seven Dangerous Days” — taking into account the travel days on either end of Songkran — during which traffic-related casualties

spike in a country where road traffic death rates ranked No. 9 worldwide in the World Health Organization’s 2018 road safety report. Many accidents involve drunk driving, and motorcyclists account for a large number of the deaths.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand

Japan auteur Kitano’s latest samurai film headed to Cannes

By Yuri Kageyama
The Associated Press

TOKYO — Takeshi Kitano’s new film, premiering at the Cannes Film Festival this month, is a samurai story without heroes, mercilessly portraying human greed, betrayal, and cruelty.

Kitano, awarded the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival for his *Hana-Bi* in 1997, wanted to make a different kind of period piece in *Kubi*, or “neck,” a reference to traditional Japanese beheadings.

“Most samurai films portray famous

people and don’t focus on the dirty side of human existence or show how evil people don’t care a hoot about slaughtering regular people,” Kitano told reporters.

The story features a 16th-century feud centered around Oda Nobunaga, a powerful warlord — well known in Japan but not as familiar for overseas audiences. But the Shakespearean intrigues are familiar enough.

The spectacular battle scenes evoke Akira Kurosawa classics like *Seven Samurai* and *Kagemusha*, according to Takeshi Natsuno, president of Kadokawa, the production company behind *Kubi*.

Kitano, age 76, began in Japan’s equivalent of vaudeville as a stand-up comic with the stage name Beat Takeshi, before becoming a superstar on TV shows and films.

The latest work juxtaposes the horror of killing with the absurd, said Kitano, appearing on stage with his cast at a Tokyo hotel.

Kubi features a star-studded cast, including Hidetoshi Nishijima, marking his return to a Kitano film since the 2002 *Dolls*, which was inspired by traditional Bunraku puppet theater, as well as Ryo Kase, who appeared in

Kitano’s *Outrage* gangster series.

Kitano also acts in the new film and wrote the screenplay, based on his book, published in 2019.

Some of the most dramatic scenes in *Kubi* involve fabulous sets, but were taken in one cut or minimal cuts. Kitano said that was intentional and recalled that director Nagisa Oshima taught him to stay away from closeups in major scenes.

Kitano’s first major film role was in Oshima’s *Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence*, a drama about a Japanese prisoner of war camp during World War II, starring David Bowie and Ryuichi Sakamoto.

OREGON PROBLEM GAMBLING RESOURCE

OPGR

HELP FOR PEOPLE
AFFECTED BY GAMBLING

Is Gambling Still Fun?

How do you feel when you gamble? Do you enjoy the fun of playing, even if you don't always win? Are you able to shrug off your losses? Or do you bet more often than you're comfortable with, even if you'd like to cut back?

Free Help is Available

In Oregon free resources are available. If you want to change how you gamble, reach out. Oregon Problem Gambling Resource (OPGR) has trained counselors who specialize in supporting people affected by gambling. They can help you explore new choices and get you back in the driver's seat when it comes to gambling. Call, text or chat. You can feel better about gambling — starting today.

For more information, visit OPGR.org



