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Thailand's New Year is welcomed in with a splash.

The World's Largest Water Fight

The Songkran water festival is the most important event on the Thai calendar," writes *IL* Thailand Correspondent, Michael Cullen. "It is a time of grand celebration as people return to their home provinces to meet up with family and friends. That mass movement of people also makes it the most dangerous time of the year to be on the roads, so avoid road travel over Songkran if you can.

"The term 'Songkran' is the passing of one astrological year and the beginning of another—the Thai New Year. In previous times, the astrological calendar dictated the dates of the Songkran festival, but they are now set as April 13th to 15th each year. Some provinces and major tourist destinations like Chiang Mai and Pattaya extend this to five days of celebrations.

"Contrary to what you

may have witnessed if you've visited Thailand during Songkran, fun-loving Thais don't just throw water at each other for no reason. Traditionally, the splashes were to symbolically wash off all misfortunes of the past year, thus begin a fresh new start for the New Year. The tradition was to politely pour a small bowl of scented water on members of the family, close friends and neighbours.

"Bowls have been swapped for buckets and monster water guns."

"As Songkran has taken on a much more festive note, that traditional ceremonial bowl has become buckets, garden hoses and monster water guns. Wherever you might be for Songkran across Thailand, the spirit of festive merriment is shared amongst town residents and tourists alike. It is after all, now the world's largest water fight!"

San José's Vibrant Street Art

Costa Rica's capital has an impressive range of street art, like most larger Latin American cities.

Beautifully created murals, as well as graffiti of varying degrees of artistic merit, can be found throughout the city. But a good place to find a higher concentration of works is at the University of Costa Rica.

Walk through the university and you'll find a block of build-

ings that are perfect for street art appreciation. It's tucked between Calles 3 and 5, and feels almost like an outdoor art gallery. Every surface seems covered with paint—even doors and some pavements. The quality of the murals varies, from rudimentary to professional, but all are worthy of your attention.—*IL Coastal Costa Rica Correspondent, Kathleen Evans.*

Shopper's Paradise in Penang

"Not sure what to do on a rainy day in Penang, Malaysia? Spend the day shopping in a 24-acre lush tropical garden at the [Design Village Outlet Mall](#)," writes *IL* contributor, Kirsten Raccuia.

"It's only a 40-minute drive from the capital George Town and considered the greenest mall in Malaysia. Unlike most other major shopping malls, it has an open-air concept. The layout is a single level with water features strewn throughout the landscaping and only the stores

are air-conditioned.

"The wide walkways are covered to shelter you from the tropical rains that sometimes occur without warning. International names like Coach, Kipling, Converse and Samsonite lead the name brands but there are plenty of local and lower-end shops as well.

"You'll find everything from travel and outdoor gear, to home décor, clothing boutiques and beauty retailers. There's even a kids playground to keep the children happy."

Violin-Making in Germany's Alps

"Overlooked by mighty mountains and located about 110 kilometres from Munich, the German town of Mittenwald has been a celebrated violin-making centre for centuries," writes *IL* contributor Tricia Mitchell. "Once positioned on a lucrative trade route linking northern Europe to Italy, handcrafted violins from Mittenwald have become synonymous with quality.

"A master craftsman named Matthias Klotz, together with his sons, became a leading producer of violins in the town. Mozart is even said to have played a violin

from the Klotz family workshop.

"Mittenwald's Violin-Making Museum [Geigenbaumuseum](#) houses hundreds of stringed instruments and highlights the town's musical tradition. You can also step into one of the numerous violin-making workshops taking place to learn more about this specialised craft.

"Afterwards, stroll the pedestrianised area and admire Mittenwald's frescoed buildings.

Hiking, climbing, biking and skiing opportunities also abound in the area. Discover more [here](#)."

DID YOU KNOW? Transparent molding frames invented by horticulturist Tomoyuki Ono make it possible to grow square watermelons. A popular gift in Japan, they're also easier to store and transport.