

# Happy New Year!

Posted on



April stands out as the biggest holiday in Sri Lanka, as the majority of the population joyfully celebrates their New Year. Sinhala people commemorate their New Year, while Tamil communities also engage in their own festivities. This creates a vibrant atmosphere, allowing everyone to enjoy an extended and lively holiday. Importantly, Sri Lankans living abroad also observe these celebrations on the same day, reinforcing cultural ties. The significance of 'Time' cannot be overlooked during the Sinhala New Year, as celebrations are guided by specific auspicious moments that enhance the experience.

Sinhala New Year, celebrated in 'Bak Māsaya' (April) according to the lunar calendar, marks a significant moment as the sun transitions. The term 'Bak' translates to 'Bhāgya' in Sanskrit, symbolizing fortune. This festival represents the reaping of the First Harvest of the year, making it a cornerstone celebration for farming communities in the villages. The customs and rituals associated with this New Year are deeply ingrained in village life and hold far greater importance than they do in urban areas, where community ties may not be as strong. The festival is rooted in astrology, focusing on auspicious timings, yet it never overlooks the essential religious rituals that accompany the celebrations. Families, relatives, and neighbors come together to honor these traditions. Additionally, the government recognizes the significance of this occasion, participating in the festivities as a national celebration.

As the New Year season approaches, the landscape transforms into a vibrant display of nature's beauty. Fresh leaves emerge, and trees burst into bloom, particularly showcasing the stunning 'Erabudu Mal', a local flower. The air is filled with the fragrant promise of abundant fruits, including mangoes, rambutans, Kaju Puhulam (Cashew Apple), and jackfruits. Additionally, the arrival of the New Year is heralded by a special guest, the rare 'KOHĀ' bird, whose presence signals the joyful transition into a new year.

To truly celebrate the New Year in a meaningful way, we should focus on our goals and aspirations. Let's embrace a healthier approach to ringing in the new year.

The village folks have a much deeper connection to the New Year celebration than the townspeople. They enthusiastically prepare for the festival by transforming their surroundings and crafting delicious sweetmeats such as Kevum, Kokis, Athirasa, Aggalā, Āsmee, and Aluwa. Beyond these delightful treats, they also create vibrant, special outfits guided by astrological principles, showcasing their commitment to tradition. While town dwellers can find everything ready and waiting in markets, they miss out on the rich mental and physical experiences that the village folks embrace when the New Year arrives. Ultimately, it is the village communities that truly embody the spirit of the New Year celebration.

New Year customs are steeped in tradition, and one of the key practices is the observation of the moon. Before the New Year begins, it's essential to view the moon for the old year and then the new moon on a specified day, as guided by the 'Nakath' (the New Year auspicious timetables). Following the astrological guidelines is paramount to fulfilling these traditions. Bathing at an auspicious time with specific herbs outlined in the calendar is also a vital part of the celebration. In ancient times, announcing the auspicious moment involved beating drums or ringing bells in temples; today, firecrackers serve that purpose. Unlike some old customs, many rituals are performed during the 'Nonagathaya' or neutral period, a time not defined by astrology. During this neutral period, New Year customs followers refrain from all work and transactions, dedicating themselves to religious and family activities. This time, referred to as 'Punya Kālaya' or auspicious time, provides an opportunity for relaxation and family bonding. As a result, participants experience not only relaxation but also enhanced well-being, clarity, and mindfulness.

According to the auspicious calendar, the New Year dawns on April 14 each year. On this day, celebrators engage in a variety of meaningful rituals. During the first half of the day, they focus entirely on cooking and enjoying festive meals, abstaining from work to honor their religious traditions. In the latter half, they shift gears to enjoy their meals and resume their daily activities. The special meal typically includes 'Kiribath,' or milk rice, which holds great significance. Before indulging in this meal, it's essential to light the hearth at an auspicious time, facing a specific direction known as 'Subha Disāwa.' They then boil milk in a new earthen pot,

allowing it to overflow at the right moment — a powerful symbol of prosperity. Once the rituals are complete, it's time to savor the milk rice along with sweetmeats, marking the occasion with joy and abundance.

Respecting elders by offering a sheaf of betel is a cherished custom that plays a significant role in our culture. In return for this gesture, we receive blessings and gifts from our parents, reinforcing the bond of family. During the Avurudu Season, we also present New Year gifts to our relatives, visit their homes, and strengthen our relationships and friendships. This tradition not only helps us to put aside any past grievances but also fosters a sense of calm and joy within our communities. After embracing these customs, we embrace the celebration by organizing various New Year's games, known as 'Aluth Avurudu Krida,' which include Olinda keliya, Eluvan keliya, Raban geseema, Onchili vāran, Keta gaseema, Gamavate diveema, and Kamba edeema. Additionally, marathons and bicycle races are held, making this festive season vibrant and engaging for everyone involved.

One of the standout traditions is selecting the 'Avurudu Kumāraya and Avurudu Kumāri,' or New Year Prince and Princess. Following these vibrant Avurudu customs, they take part in a tree plantation campaign, setting a commendable example for the entire world. To mark the end of the New Year Season, they receive blessings through anointing with special oil, stepping on herbal leaves, and having additional leaves placed above their heads. By honoring these time-honored rituals, they strongly believe that these practices and religious services provide protection from evil and invite blessings of good health and longevity.

The New Year celebration is a wonderful tradition, but it's important to recognize the potential pitfalls associated with it. Unfortunately, some individuals take the festivities too far, indulging in excessive drinking, smoking, drug use, and gambling. Many alcohol users become addicted, leading to a host of health issues over time. Furthermore, some may find themselves losing not only their money and wealth but also valued friendships. To truly celebrate the New Year in a meaningful way, we should focus on our goals and aspirations. Let's embrace a healthier approach to ringing in the new year. I extend my heartfelt wishes to all readers and people around the world for good health, longevity, and peace in the future—free from sorrow and conflict. May peace reign globally! "Subha Aluth Avuruddak Wewa."



Happy New Year!

Ven Diyapattugama Revatha Thero, Chief Incumbent of the Siriwardhanaramaya Temple, Kollupitiya.