

Pista ng Bayan ng San Juan



All towns and suburbs named San Juan (St. John the Baptist) celebrate this festival, which involves playful "baptism" with fragrant water and is meant as a coy flirtation between the sexes. It can degenerate into a free-for-all water fight with much drenching and laughter. Places to see and be drenched include San Juan in Metro Manila; Baylan in Batangas, which stages a lechon parade; Punta in Taytay, near Bacolod City, in Negros Occidental and Camiguin, North Mindanao.

Feast of Saint John the Baptist: San Juan! San Juan! Basaan!

People in Xishuangbanna, southwest China, douse one another with a basin of water to usher in spring. In Thailand, people sprinkle water on guests at a water festival in April. The Philippines has its own version of these Buddhist traditions, when it celebrates the Feast of San Juan Bautista, or St. John the Baptist.

In many parts of Europe and North America, people kindle bonfires on hilltops at the approaching summer solstice, when the days begin to grow shorter. To this ancient ritual are added other festive activities like games and parades, street dancing, outdoor eating, carnival attractions, and fireworks. Such gaiety may well be their version of a Philippine fiesta, but for the fact that the custom coincides with the Feast of St. John the Baptist on June 24.

West meets east in the Philippines when June 24 is celebrated by dousing and sprinkling of water or by family outings to the beach or riverside.

This Filipino custom is the most appropriate way of commemorating the only saint, other than Mary, whose birth is celebrated in the Christian liturgy. (Feasts of other saints fall on the day of their death.) After all, Saint John is the precursor who prepared people for the coming of Christ by baptizing them with water.

Matthew 2:11 quotes Saint John as saying: "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire."

Anyone who goes to the town of San Juan, Metro Manila on the morning of June 24 cannot stay dry. neither will anyone who visits small towns near a stream, a river, or the sea before noon. The experience is supposed to remind one of one's baptism.

Small children use a tabo, usually an empty can used as a water dipper, to douse strangers with water. Older persons may fill their ancient coconut shells with perfumed water to sprinkle on passersby. Others get their bamboo cylinders fitted with pistons to squirt water on whoever passes by. Still others use water pistols.

Unfortunately, the tradition is being threatened by killjoys or local bullies who douse car owners or jeepney riders with water from open ditches. Their actions have made others question the very idea of the festivity.



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