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TrekShare.com – Crashing a wedding in Laos – Part 1

By Joseph Kultgen

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Any reasonable person would think it slightly off-color to crash a wedding. When that wedding happens to be in Laos

who is to say if it's inappropriate or not? Whom am I kidding? I was well aware of the potential drawbacks of dropping in on an event that I was clearly not invited. It

wouldn't be the first time leering eyes would be cast upon me as I casually pressed my way up to the buffet table.

Let's regress for a minute. Some people might not know what the word "crash" means in the first sentence. For those of you who have been sheltered from large community centers/bowling alleys for the duration of your lives I can understand. It's been my experience that a bowling alley in the same venue as a wedding reception brings out the largest proportion of uninvited guests or what we like to call "wedding crashers."

That certainly wasn't the case here. No bowling alleys in Laos! In particular no bowling alley that doubles as a reception hall. This of course is not a researched fact, but I'm willing to bet anyone 100,000 kip that in two weeks you couldn't find any sign of the leisure sport of the drunk. Lawn bowling doesn't count. For all I know lawn bowling or "bocce ball" is their national sport eclipsed only by badminton and a game of hands-free volleyball played with a wicker ball. The name eludes me almost as much as the skill needed to play the sport.

The truth is I was hungry. A traditional Lao massage administered by blind women in the late afternoon completely wiped me out and I had just woken at 11PM from a 4-hour nap. If you're still reading this you might wonder how does one

get "wiped out" from a massage. Aren't these things supposed to be relaxing? Yeah and no. Primarily NO in my case. It appears that the muscles from my toes to my thighs don't like to be physically manipulated away from the bone as the massage suggests. For a mere 30,000 Kip or \$3 US - an hour massage from a skilled therapist seems like a great deal. That is if sometime in that hour you don't burst all the blood vessels in your face from wincing so hard. If my therapist hadn't been blind I'm pretty sure she would have thought she was killing me. I would have felt like a puss so I broke out the yoga breathing and prayed not to succumb to hyperventilation.

Regardless, it was now 11PM and if I didn't move from my guesthouse quickly there would be little chance of finding any late night eatery in Luang Prabang. Places tend to close after the electricity cuts at 9PM.

Things looked bleak upon leaving the guesthouse. There didn't appear to be any lights, tuk tuk drivers or for that matter people in site. There was, however, a clear path of music being generated from beyond the cement building horizon.

Sounded like a party. Parties oftentimes have food. So off we went. At this stage of the story I introduce you to my friend Paul who spent most of the duration of the night within earshot of me. It became clear to me as we rounded the first corner that the music was definitely coming from this street. It was time to move beyond my usual sloth like pace caused by the extreme heat and humidity. I could see a few motor scooters in the distance coming and going.

As we got closer it became evident that this was the real deal. People were hopping on their Chinese manufactured motor scooters in suits with beautiful Laotian women draped over the backs. They sit sidesaddle because their silk skirts or "sins" wraps tightly down to their ankles. A quick decision was needed as we approached the entry gate. Just walk in slowly and pretend I'm not with the poorly dressed vagabond to my side. This wouldn't work. We entered the gate, saw about 20 people sitting at tables and another 30 or so under a wooden canopy dancing to live music. I noticed there weren't any people doing the drunken "hook-up" stager that are so prevalent at weddings in the states. The vibe was comfortable, respectful and fully devoid of my wedding experiences.

I made a b-line for the 15-foot buffet table. It was

definitely the path of least resistance. It was obvious that everyone had finished eating at least 2 hours prior and the table was in the process of being taken down. Seemed fairly logical that I grab a spring roll and dowse it in some spicy papaya sauce before it becomes a leftover. Before I could even put the first bite in my mouth a pair of women rounded the table and handed us all the utensils we needed. "Kop Chi Li Li" or thank you spewed from mouth about 100 times in the next 3 minutes. They either liked the way I pronounced the phrase or had giant hearts because their smiles stretched from ear to ear.

The buffet had what appeared to most of the staples of the Laos diet. There was a type of yellow chicken curry, some spicy beef, springrolls, fresh vegetables and a giant vat of sticky rice. Within seconds of loading up our plates the two drunkest 20-year olds at the party pulled up four chairs for us. One for our plates and the other for our asses.

Before even taking my first bit I had a 1/3 glass full of BeerLao between my eyes.

This is where the story takes a dramatic twist. It is not because I started drinking. That's a little later. The twist is because this story is being composed for Break Magazine and they don't allow any references to drugs or alcohol. Therefore I have written two versions. The one where I drink myself to a point where I believe I can understand the Lao language is the version you are reading. Although we were given utensils I chose to forego the westernization of the land and eat using the dipping technique utilized by most people. Three bites in and once again a 1/3 full glass of BeerLao is between my eyes. The young man offering the glass was pimped out in a black tuxedo and appeared to be the kind of guy whom you should accept a drink from. Another "kop chi li li", a swig from his glass and we were friends. I pulled up another chair for the special guest and we began to speak. The conversation took a slow start. Not because of tuxedo man, but rather because I had been so used to talking to people who spoke absolutely no English, that I was conversing like a trained monkey.

Shortly into the conversation I learned Pond was indeed the honored guest at what I learned was his wedding. The handsome 24-year old had just been hitched and he oozed elation. As I scarified down my food I learned he works for the Lao government as an AIDS educator. He also told us

about a cousin of his who lives in NYC and his desire to my town. My door will always be open.

Laotian men usually marry in their twenties. The bride is usually younger. She will most likely be from the same village and will probably be related in some degree because most villages are small. Couples choose each other, but the heads of both families decide when the couple will marry, where they will live, and what bride price must be paid to the girl's father. This is usually in currency, although in olden times it was in livestock or grain.

The groom's family delivers the bride price to the bride's father on the day before the wedding. The groom's relative's parade to the bride's house with gifts of food, tobacco, betel and so on. The groom makes his formal request for the bride. Her family, after a long-winded, purely ceremonial show of reluctance finally agrees. In the presence of a bonze or village elder, the couple is officially betrothed. The next day, the groom and his relatives again proceed to the bride's house, where they make a great show of fighting and bribe their way into the yard. The groom must persuade the bride's sister to wash his feet before he can ascend the steps to the house and

claim his bride.

Divorce is rare in Laos, partly because each marriage concerns everyone in two large, extended families. If a marriage is dissolved, the bride price has to be returned, and there are endless complications concerning inheritance and land use. It is much more sensible to compromise.

Working things out, in general, is the Laotian response to almost every conflict. Isn't that a novel idea?

In the background we watched the nucleus of the party dance.

Thankfully there are no traditions of the Marquerena or chicken dance in Laos. This is one of the things I'm happiest about. Tonight they danced the Lamvong. It's a combination folk dance and courting ritual. Girls dance in place with short, rhythmic steps, while boys weave circles around them; no one touches. The faces of the dancers are completely expressionless, but their arms and hands wave in complicated patterns expressive of love and devotion.

Frankly, unless you are Laotian, you will end up looking like a queen doing this jig.

The groom apologized to us that the party we crashed was almost over. He insisted we accompany him to the parents of his wife's house for an after party. The two guys sitting

next to us indicated that they would escort us to the party. Pond cordially dismissed himself and affirmed our attendance.

As soon as the 48-ounce bottle of BeerLao was cashed we would head out. As the pace and the amount of the beer in the glass increased I decided to engage the transportation question. I was pretty sure these guys had scooters. Frankly I'm not a big fan of riding on the back of those things in any situation. In addition, I was positive both these guys were half in the bag. Through struggled words and gulps of beer I asked our new friends about drinking and driving.

Joseph Kultgen is co-founder of www.trekshare.com and has been writing the monthly newsletter – TrekNews – for the past 3 years. He is a contributor to STA Travel and Gap literature as well as a co-creator of TrekTV.

Crash Course on Wedding Crashing

By Hanif Khaki

What you're about to read is a 'labor of love'.

Hours and hours of learning and research went into gaining this experience and compiling it in a form you can benefit from. This article was meant to be a useful, educational and instructive resource for anyone interested in this topic.

Enjoy it – and let us know what you think.

For most occasions, there are invitations. In every invitation, there is an invited guest. There-in lies the subject of our discussion. You see, for every party, there are bound to be party crashers.

A prime example is wedding celebrations. There are people who come to the event without an invitation and who in fact are not even invited. These are known as the wedding crashers.

Wedding crashers are "unexpected guests" mainly because they were not invited to the event. These crashers are drawn to these occasions like moths to a flame.

So, for anyone who wishes to know how to become a wedding crasher, here are some tips that you can use.

1. Try to be a long-lost cousin or someone who is "within" the family.

In most wedding celebrations, the family is always included. In fact, most of the wedding invitations

tend to be some sort of family reunions since many family members are present from out of town.

And because there are a large number of relatives present in the celebration, the bride or the groom will be less inclined to notice who you are or where you came from. This makes the "long lost cousin" strategy effective.

The above "crash technique" works particularly well when carrying a beautifully wrapped gift box with you. After all, who would question somebody who has brought such a lovely and beautifully wrapped gift with them.

Sidenote: Hope you're finding this useful? I have always been curious about this matter. And when I found very little quality information about it, I decided to share a part of what I've learned about it – which is why this article came to be written. Read on.

2. Try being a staff member of the wedding caterer or wedding coordinator.

In order to be able to crash a wedding, you could always pretend to be a staff member.

In a wedding, there are lots of people being hired in the planning and preparation. So one way of crashing into the scene is to impersonate a staff member of the catering company or the flower

arrangement company.

This added bonus will allow you to enjoy a very nice meal. If questioned by another guest, you could always explain that you are a friend of someone who is also at the party.

Pick the name of your choice. You can always find someone else's name when you are being asked why you are at the party or who you are with.

This is a safe tactic if you do not feel like choosing whose side of the couple you will take in order to introduce yourself. With this strategy, you can be quite sure that with over a hundred or 200 guests in the party, not many people would even think of verifying your name or identity.

4. Dress to kill.

The best part of being a wedding crasher is to dress up a little bit in order to suit the occasion. Even if it means that you were "dressed to kill," it would be better to dress appropriately in order to fit in the event.

After all, wedding crashing is not all about free food and wine. It can also be one way of finding that one true love.

5. Proper Timing is essential.

One of the most important things one should remember when crashing the party is to arrive very late.

This is because by the time you have arrived, most guests have started drinking and socializing, to a point where their guard is down and there is no defense is relatively low.

As a result, when you arrive, most people will not notice your entrance and you may easily join the party and blend in.

Indeed, wedding crashing can fill up your social calendar quite quickly if you so choose.

I hope you gained something from this article. Be sure to check for additional information online on this topic. You may drop me a quick note to share your thoughts and comments on it.

There's also more to come so please keep visiting often to get the latest information!

Hanif Khaki is the acclaimed author of numerous how-to articles and the founder of the popular wedding resources site



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