

Do Son Buffalo Fighting Festival - Hai Phong City Festival

Written by Nava Nahi

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Thousands of people annually gathered at the stadium of Do Son Town, Hai Phong City to witness the attractive performances of buffalos within the Do Son Buffalo Fighting Festival, an outstanding and unique festival one in Vietnam which is associated with different legends.



One of the **legends** has it that long time ago, one Creator caused a severe drought. All living things looked toward the sea, praying for Creator's favour. In the most miserable moment, suddenly, people saw two buffalos fighting fiercely on the wave crests and the rains started to pour down, revive all creature. The local people organise the fighting performance annually to show, not only their great gratitude for the Sir Buffalo but also their desire for the immortal vitality and strength of coastal people of Haiphong. Being held officially and annually on the ninth day of the eighth month of the lunar calendar since the 18th century, the festival is a chance for local people to pray for prosperity and happiness.

The **preparation** for this buffalo fighting festival is an elaborate process, from the 5th and the 6th lunar month itself. The competing buffalos must be carefully selected and methodically trained months in advance of the festival. These buffalos, that had experienced the qualifying round, must be between 4 and 5 years old, with a good appearance, a wide chest, a big groin, a long neck, an acute bottom and bow shaped horns. The selected buffalos, after all the elimination rounds, are fed in separate cages to keep them from contact with common buffalos.

Buffalo fighting performance

The beginning of the worshipping ceremony lasts until lunch time. Do Son Buffalo Fighting Festival takes off with a colorful procession with an octet and a big procession chair, carried by six strong young men. The chosen buffalos, covered with red cloth and red band around their horns, are taken to the fighting ring by 24 young men, from each side dressed in red. The young men dance and wave flags as the two teams of troops take their positions in the fighting ground. The dance was mingled with the ebullient sound of drums and gongs, bringing a hectic atmosphere to the

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festival. After this event, a pair of buffalos is led to opposite sides of the festival grounds and is made to stand near two flags called Ngu Phung. As soon as the right signal is released, the two buffalos are led into the fighting circle. At the next signal, the two leaders release the ropes that are attached to the noses of the buffalos. With well-practiced movements, the buffalos rush into each other, using their fighting skills to decide the right to enter the next match while the spectators shout and urge the fighting along. Then, the winning buffalo goes to the next round till the final winner emerges. The matches varied in terms of time, depending on the strength and stamina of the buffalos. At the completion of the fight, the spectacle of "receiving the buffalos" is very interesting as the leaders must then catch the winning buffalo to grant it its reward.

The Buffalo Fighting in Do Son is traditional festival of Vietnam attached to a Water God worshipping ceremony and the "Hien Sinh" custom. The ceremony is held in every village and chaired by its patriarch to pray for the victory at the buffalo fight, typically express the martial spirit of the local people in Do Son, Hai Phong. In recent years, this traditional festival attracted not only local residents but also thousands of domestic and international tourists.

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