Ma Karn Kluay / Banana-stalk Horse

Site of Documentation

Bangkok, Thailand

Description

*Khee Ma Karn Kluey* is (as its name suggests) a toy, shaped like a horse that is made from a banana stalk. The toy is popular with children from Bangkok, Thailand.

Who Plays?

This game can be played alone or with a group of friends. There is no maximum number of players, although a race usually has around five competitors. It can be played by both boys and girls, aged 4 to 7 years old.

Accessories/Equipment

The game requires each player to have a *Khee Ma Karn Kluey*, a toy that is handmade from a piece of banana stalk. As the banana stalk usually wilts within a few days, they are not sold by shops and a new toy has to be created for each game. Usually older family members make the toy for the children as it requires strength and skilled fingers to bend, cut and pierce the banana stalk.
Time and Place

*Khee Ma Karn Kluey* can be played outdoors at any time of year, as long as the weather is cool and dry. As it can take some time to make the toy, it is most often played out of school on the weekends. As the game requires a lot of running, it is best played on smooth, flat surfaces such as lawns or courtyards where the children are less likely to hurt themselves if they fall over.

Skill, Strategies and Qualities of a Good Player

The best players are those with a colourful imagination and strong legs to keep the *Khee Ma Karn Kluey* in place while they are running around.

Popularity

*Khee Ma Karn Kluey* is most popular with young boys. As the game requires the children to make the toy each time they play it is played less often than many others.

History of the Game

This game has been around played in South East Asia for many decades, as it is here that banana trees grow in abundance. Local people use each part of the plant; they eat the fruit, cook the flower, use the leaves to wrap food and to put in flower arrangements and feed the banana stalk to animals. The stalk of the banana leaf is often used to make children toys.

How to Make the Toy?

1. First, players need to find a large, fresh banana leaf.
2. Next, trim all the leaf on either side of the stem off the stalk. A section of leaf (around 5 inches long) should be left on the top of the leaf – to make a tail. This section of leaf can be shredded into narrow sections to make it look more like horse hair!

3. At around 30 cm from the widest end of the stalk, make two deep cuts (4 inches long) and bend the remainder of stalk at a 90 degree angle – to make the head and ears.
4. Insert a long thin stick between the ‘head’ and ‘body’ of the toy, to give extra strength and stability to the toy.

5. Finally, tie a long string (approximately 1 metre) onto both ends of the long ‘body’.
How is the Game Played?

Step 1. Players need to position the horse between their legs, so the stick is squeezed between their thighs, while the head sticks out in front of them. The players must place the string over their shoulder, hold onto the toy and run as if they are riding a horse.

Step 2. Next, players have to agree on a race track, they can draw a start and finish line on the ground or just mark it with bags or shoes. Once determined, the players all line up behind the start line, ready to race.
Step 3. One player plays the role of referee and when ready gives the start signal. At the signal, the players race towards the finish line. The first one to cross it wins the game.