

## **All about Chinese New Year**

Chinese New Year is a holiday that celebrates the beginning of a new year according to the lunar calendar. It is considered to be one of the most important holidays for Chinese families. Some people prefer to call Chinese New Year the Lunar New Year because the holiday was originally from China but later on celebrate with Korean, Vietnamese, Tibetan and Mongolian.

The holiday is celebrated with big family gatherings, gift giving, the eating of symbolic foods and display of festive decorations--all focused on bringing good luck for the new year and celebrating the coming of Spring.

## **When Is Chinese New Year?**

The start of Chinese New Year changes every year since it is dictated by the lunar calendar. The Gregorian or solar calendar--which is based on the Earth's movement around the sun and has a fixed number of 365 days a year (366 during a leap year)--is the most widely used calendar system in the world and has been the official calendar used in China since 1912.

But in China the lunar calendar is still used to determine traditional holidays such as Chinese New Year. Since the lunar calendar is based on the phases of the moon-- which has a shorter cycle than the sun--Chinese New Year is never on the same day each year, but typically falls somewhere between January 21st and February 20<sup>th</sup>.

## **How Long Do Chinese New Year Celebrations Last?**

Celebrations can actually last up to a month, especially in China. Originally the celebrations lasted for lengthy amounts of time because China was a very agriculture-based country so farmers took the whole month off to rest since crops couldn't be planted during the winter.

Nowadays most families celebrate the New Year for about two weeks, starting on the first day of the new year and end on the 15<sup>th</sup>.

## **How to celebrate Chinese New Year**

### **\* Clean house and new clothes**

Prior to the first day of the New Year it is customary for families to thoroughly clean their homes from top to bottom. Doing this is said to clear out any bad luck from the previous year and to ready the house to accept good luck for the coming year.

All cleaning must be finished before New Year's Day so there is no chance of accidentally throwing out the good fortune of the new year. "Before New Year's Day you want to buy new clothes or cut your hair" in order to have a fresh start, says Ng. Wearing black is not allowed due to its association with death, however, wearing red is encouraged as the color is associated with warding off bad spirits.

### **\* Decorate the house**

Another popular custom is to hang up signs and posters on doors and windows with the Chinese word *fu* written on them, which translates to luck and happiness. Buying flowers for the home is also commonplace since they symbolize the coming of spring and a new beginning.

### **\* Fireworks and holiday greetings**

You can find people greeting to one and other “Gong Xi (Congratulations)” during the spring festival. Also, all kinds of loud noises such as fireworks, firecrackers, and music are preferred in Chinese New year. All of these has to do with ancient tale in Han Dynasty (206BC-220AD)

*Long ago, a monster named "Nian" came once each new year's eve to a little village and scared everyone. One day, the villagers discovered by luck that Nian was afraid of the color red and even more afraid of scary loud noises. So the villagers prepared ahead, they waved their red banners and rattled their noise makers when "Nian" came to the village. They scared "Nian" so much that it ran away and was never heard from again. All the villagers came out from their homes and hiding places to congratulate each other and had a wonderful new year with peace.*

### **\* Parade, dragon dance and lion dance**

The annual event used to commemorate the spring festival is a colorful parade complete with animated dragon and lion figures. These fantastic creatures manipulated by expert dancers move through city streets and in and out of businesses during the festivities. Expert dancers animate a large, undulating cloth dragon and prancing lions that make their way through the flurry of excited spectators. It is believed that the loud beats of the drum and the deafening sounds of the cymbals together with the face of the dragon or lion dancing aggressively can evict bad or evil spirits. Frequent bursts of firecrackers are heard along the parade route.

### **\* Visit traditional markets**

Markets or village fairs are set up as the New Year is approaching. These usually open-air markets feature newyear related products such as flowers, toys, clothing, and even fireworks. It is convenient for people to buy gifts for their newyear visits as well as their home decoration. In some places, the practice of shopping for the perfect plum tree is not dissimilar to the Western tradition of buying a Christmas tree.

### **\* Dinner with family**

On Chinese New Year's Eve it is customary to visit with relatives and partake in a large dinner where a number of specific foods are served.

Typically families do eight or nine dishes because they are lucky numbers. The Chinese word for eight rhymes the word for prosperity and the word for nine means long-lasting.

A lot of the foods are very symbolic. Some popular foods include: dumplings (because they look like golden nuggets-the ancient Chinese currency), oranges (because they are perfectly round, symbolizing completeness and wholeness), and long noodles (served to symbolize long life).

Sticky rice cakes and sweets are also served and are tied to a story about the Kitchen God-- a Santa Claus-like figure who reports to the Jade Emperor in heaven on whether families have been good or bad through the course of the year. According to legend, when families serve the Kitchen God sticky, delicious foods, his mouth gets stuck together and therefore he cannot report any bad things about the family to the Jade Emperor.

### **\* Give good luck gifts**

It is a traditional practice for adults to give children little red envelopes (*hong bao* in Mandarin or *lai-see* in Cantonese) filled with money in order to symbolize wealth and prosperity for the coming year. It is also common for elders to bestow red packets to unmarried members of the family. It is a sign of respect to bow three times in order to accept the red envelopes. Envelopes are not to be opened until the recipient has left the home of the giver. If the envelopes are received before new year's eve, they are not to be opened till the first day of the new year.

### **Make lanterns**

The New Year's festivities come to an end on the fifteenth day of the new year, which is celebrated by the Lantern Festival. The Lantern Festival honors the first full moon of the year and represents the coming of springtime.

Families will light lanterns, which symbolize the brightness of spring, and hang them on walls around the house, or on poles to be carried in lantern parades.

Year of the Snake  
新年快乐



蛇年

gung hay fat choy!

HAPPY NEW YEAR!





