

Happy Chinese New Year

A large, traditional red lantern with a textured surface and a yellow glow from within, hanging in the foreground. In the background, there are blurred lights and fireworks exploding in a dark sky, creating a festive atmosphere.

A quick guide to understanding
what the Chinese New Year is
and how it's celebrated

Our
COOP



About Chinese New Year and Lunar New Year

Lunar New Year is celebrated across many Asian cultures and countries, including China, Vietnam, Korea, Mongolia, Taiwan, and more. While these celebrations share a common lunar calendar, traditions and customs vary widely by culture and region.

In this guide, we use the term Chinese New Year to reflect that the traditions and examples referenced are specifically rooted in Chinese culture. We recognise and value other Lunar New Year celebrations as distinct and equally important and would welcome colleagues' input to this guide.

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[Click here to read more about some of the legends of the Chinese New Year](#)

What's the Chinese New Year

Millions of people celebrate the Chinese New Year, also referred to as the Spring Festival. In fact, it's one of the biggest events of the year for many East and South Asian people and will be marked by communities all over the world.

The Chinese New Year falls on a different day each year as it's based on the lunar calendar (which is when there's a new moon) but it will always fall between 21 January and 20 February. It's the most important celebration in the Chinese calendar.

The New Year celebrations last fifteen days and end with the Chinese Lantern Festival.

There are a few reasons why the Chinese New Year is celebrated:

Legend – the Chinese New Year stemmed from an ancient battle against Nian, a terrifying beast. The people used fireworks and firecrackers to chase the beast away.

Rest – the celebrations were started as a way for farmers and workers to have a rest from their year-long hard work. Even today, everyone will have a long holiday to make sure they're rested.

How's Chinese New Year celebrated?

The most important part of the Chinese New Year celebration is the 'Reunion Dinner' on Chinese New Year Eve. This is when all the extended family and all generations will join together and eat. Dishes with lucky meanings will be served.

Cleaning is another tradition of the Chinese New Year. This is because in Mandarin 'dust' is said the same as the word for 'oldness or staleness'.

Red envelopes filled with money are often given to children during Chinese New Year to pass on the good fortune and blessings for the coming year. The colour red represents good luck.

Paper cutting is a form of traditional art in China and people will make elaborate artwork to display in their windows to welcome the Spring.

As this celebration is an important time for families; people will travel great distances to be with family. This is known as chun yun.

People will stay up late (shousui) to see in the New Year. In more recent years, it's become a custom to watch the CCTV New Year Gala which starts at 8pm and ends when the Chinese New Year arrives at midnight. It features China's best singers, dancers and acrobats.



[Click here to watch how Angela, a 12 year old girl in China celebrates](#)

15 days of Chinese New Year celebrations



[Click here](#) to read more about the Chinese Lantern Festival

Day 1

Chinese New Year's Day: Chinese people believe what they do on the first day of the New Year will affect their luck during the year.

There'll be lots of fireworks and it's believed the louder the fireworks, the better and luckier they'll be. They also believe the fireworks will drive away evil. New clothes are worn and New Year's greetings are given. Younger generations will visit the older generations to wish them health and longevity. Lion and dragon dances are often performed on New Year's Day and are especially popular in Hong Kong.

Day 2

Traditionally, married daughters visit their parents' home on this day and will bring gifts and red envelopes for their family. On this day, people will also offer sacrifices to the God of

Wealth, wishing for a luckier and more prosperous year.

Days 3 – 7

This is the period of time when people will visit their relatives and friends. Chinese people will not clean their house during the first two days of the New Year as sweeping is believed to sweep away the good luck gained during the celebrations.

Day 8

People usually return to work on the eighth day as eight is the luckiest number in Chinese.

Day 15

This is traditionally the end of the Spring Festival celebrations. Some people will send glowing lanterns into the sky, while others release floating lanterns onto the sea or on rivers or lakes.

The 12 Chinese New Year Animals

There are 12 Chinese New Year animals according to the Chinese Zodiac.

It's believed that babies that are born under a particular Chinese New Year animal will adopt the characteristics of that animal. For example, children born in the year of the dragon will inherit energy, power and wisdom. The different animal will also determine that year's fortune and that animal will be at the centre of the celebrations for that year.

RAT - born in 1960, 1972, 1984, 1996, 2008, 2020. You are charming, picky, ambitious and bright.

OX - born in 1961, 1973, 1985, 1997, 2009, 2021. You are patient, hardworking and dependable.

TIGER - born in 1962, 1974, 1986, 1998, 2010, 2022. You can be rebellious and unpredictable but at the same time protective and sympathetic.

RABBIT - born in 1963, 1975, 1987, 1999, 2011, 2023. The Rabbit is considered the luckiest of the Chinese Zodiac animals.

DRAGON - born in 1964, 1976, 1988, 2000, 2012, 2024. Chinese consider it a great honour to be born in the Year of the Dragon. Dragons are full of strength and energy and are always on the go.

SNAKE - born in 1965, 1977, 1989, 2001, 2013, 2025. Snakes are determined, wise and intense.

HORSE - born in 1966, 1978, 1990, 2002, 2014, 2026. Horses are popular and very attractive.

SHEEP / GOAT - born in 1967, 1979, 1991, 2003, 2015. You are creative and elegant.

MONKEY - born in 1968, 1980, 1992, 2004, 2016. Monkeys are charming and intelligent.

ROOSTER - born in 1969, 1981, 1993, 2005, 2017. You enjoy learning and are not afraid to work.

DOG - born in 1958, 1970, 1982, 1994, 2006, 2018. Dogs are loyal and sincere.

PIG - born in 1959, 1971, 1983, 1995, 2007, 2019. The last animal in the Chinese Zodiac cycle, you're brave, noble and chivalrous.





The significance of food in the Chinese New Year celebrations

Food plays a big part of the Chinese New Year celebrations. Certain dishes will be eaten during Chinese New Year for their symbolic meaning. Lucky food is served during the 16 days festival season, especially on Chinese New Year dinner.

Not only do the dishes matter but also the way they're prepared and served. The most common Chinese New Year foods include dumplings, fish, spring rolls and niangao (this is a sweet rice cake).

Fish represents prosperity

When they're eating a fish dish, people might say things like 'may you always have more than you need!'

Chinese dumplings represents wealth

There's an old Chinese tradition of hiding a coin inside one of the New Year's Eve dumplings as it's said to bring the one who finds it good luck.

Chinese New Year Cake represents higher income or position.

It's a simple steamed cake, made with glutinous rice flour for a mochi-like chewy texture and is sweetened with brown sugar.



Why not test your
knowledge of Chinese
New Year with this
short quiz?



Quiz: How well do you know Chinese New Year?

[Start quiz](#)