

新年快樂

*Sun nien fai lok / Xin nian kuai le*

**Happy New Year!**



*Yao Wen-han, Joyous Celebration at the New Year, 18th century*

**The Chinese New Year festival celebrates the beginning of the new year in the traditional Chinese (or lunisolar) calendar. It is celebrated at the time of the new moon between 21 January and 20 February.**

**In Chinese, it is known as the Spring Festival, 春節, as it occurs at the start of the Spring season in the traditional Chinese calendar. Preparations begin around 8 days before the new year and festivities last for 15 days afterwards when the Lantern Festival is celebrated when the full moon appears.**

**In 104 BC, during the Han dynasty, a fixed date on the traditional Chinese calendar was decided upon to mark the start of the year and since then, festivities and celebrations have been held on this day. It is a time of family reunion and feasting, ancestor worship and traditional customs.**



# Food and Drink

Foods eaten during the New Year festival are chosen for the auspicious meanings in their pronunciation, shape or colour. The family reunion feast on New Year's Eve forms the most important part of the celebration. As with many Chinese festivals, food traditions vary widely across regions.

## Fish 魚 'yu'

Fish symbolize surplus or prosperity. This is a play on the sound of the words: 'yu' means both 'fish' and 'abundance'.

Fish are always served whole to represent the whole family coming together at New Year. Chicken is often served whole at the dinner table for the same reason.



## Dumplings 餃子 'gaaenzi/jiaozi'

The shape of the dumplings resembles Chinese gold ingots, a former currency, and therefore these dumplings represent wealth.

## Noodles 長壽麵 'chang shou mian'

The long length of the noodles symbolize a wish for long life.

## Spring rolls 春卷 'chun juan'

This dim sum dish is fried to a golden colour, representing gold and wealth.



## 年糕 'nian gao' or 'nian gou'

The pronunciation of these New Year sticky rice cakes can also mean 'high' or 'tall'. Thus, these cakes represent a wish for things to get higher or better each year - better grades in school, a better job or salary and so on. Types of nian gao vary from region to region and can be savoury or sweet.

## 湯圓 'tangyuan' or 'yuanxiao'

The round shape of these rice balls symbolizes family reunion and togetherness.



## Fruit

Oranges grapefruit, tangerines and pomelos are popular to eat, give as gifts and use as offerings for deity and ancestors. Their round shape is another way in which food symbolizes family unity and their golden colour represents wealth and prosperity.



# Traditions

Preparations for the New Year start 8 days before New Year's Eve and celebrations go on until the 15th day of the first lunar month. Every family and region has different traditions. Here are a few.

## Cleaning the House

Spring-cleaning must be done by New Year's eve. A clean house represents a fresh start and it symbolizes cleaning out bad luck and unhappy thoughts. Never clean the house on New Year's Day! It would be like sweeping the good luck away!



## Decorations

Once the house is clean, homes are decorated with an assortment of auspicious red decorations such as the good luck character 福 'fu' (or 'fook') or with flowers and plants to celebrate the hope a new year will bring. Other decorations include spring couplets (lines of poetry hung around doorways), lanterns, paper cuttings, mock gold ingots, oranges and pictures of door guardians and other gods.

## The Kitchen God 灶君 (Zao Jung/ Zao Shen)

Some people believe that there is a god that watches the family's behaviour and makes a report to the Jade Emperor at the end of every year. To encourage a good report, families may give sweet foods to the Kitchen God as a bribe!



## Red Envelopes 利事 'lai see', 紅包 'hong bao'

During Chinese New Year, red envelopes are given to young or unmarried children as gifts by elders, and there's almost always money inside. The red symbolizes good luck and fends off the bad. When you receive them, always do so with both hands, and do not open them in the presence of the giver. Always say thank you or give New Year greetings.

## Family reunion – Feasting and Remembering

At this time of year, families celebrate and eat a meal together. Food plays a huge role in Chinese New Year celebrations. Food is chosen for its symbolic meaning. It is also a time when we honour and give thanks to ancestors. Flowers, food, and incense are sometimes offered at the home's altar or at a local temple.

## Fireworks

Midnight on New Year's Eve is a noisy time! Fireworks and firecrackers are set off to celebrate the new year, fend off bad luck and bring happiness.



## Other traditions

How do you celebrate? Other traditions include wearing new clothes especially red silk ones; visiting a Temple Fair for entertainment, visiting family and friends or watching TV performances.





# Stories

## The Story of Nian

**This story helps us understand why we see a lot of red around at Chinese New Year, and why it is such a noisy time of year! If you ever go to a Chinese New Year parade, you will hear firecrackers and loud drums and music – traditions dating back to the story of Nian.**

A long time ago, deep in the mountains lived a monster called Nian. Legends said that Nian had the frame of a bull and a massive horn, and he roared so loudly everyone could hear. Once a year on New Year's Eve, Nian would go to villages looking for food - this would scare all the villagers. He ate crops... and children! This is why on the night that Nian would visit, families got together, shut their doors, and had a big family dinner so they were together and didn't get scared. More importantly, families prayed for protection to their ancestors.

After dinner, no one dared to sleep. When the day got dark, just as the villagers suspected, Nian came. But because everybody hid in their homes in preparation, everybody was safe. Nian passed through the village each year. When the sun came out, everybody in the village celebrated. And so it was that for many years although the villagers were scared of Nian he never harmed them.

However, as the years passed the villagers began to be less careful. And one New Year's Eve, as usual, Nian came looking for food. To his amazement, he could smell some delicious scents and as he followed his nose, he came upon a village hall which had a wedding party going on inside. Nian decided at once to burst in and steal all the wedding food. But as he did so, he was met with a sea of red clothes, as people were twisting and turning, dancing and enjoying themselves, wearing the colour red for celebration. In confusion and fear, Nian ran out the door as quickly as he possibly could.

Nian was still hungry. Ahead of him, he saw a group of families playing together in the street. Nian slowly approached them, not realising they were having fun setting off firecrackers and fireworks. Suddenly, WHOOSH CLAP CLAP: firecrackers went off! Nian got so scared by the loud noises and the bright flashes the firecrackers made, he ran away, never to be seen again.

When the villagers awoke the next morning, they realised they had not been careful to guard against Nian that year, But they also realised that Nian was afraid of the colour red, firecrackers and loud noises. So, every year after that, a few days before Nian would visit, people decorated their homes with red, set off fireworks and made sure they made loud noises on New Year's Eve, so Nian would not dare to come ever again.



photo from: <https://www.travelchinaguide.com/essential/holidays/new-year/story.htm>





# Stories

## The Story of the Chinese Zodiac / The Great Race

Did you know we honour a different animal each year, according to the Chinese Zodiac? This story explains why.

A long time ago, the Jade Emperor in a palace in the sky decided to give people on Earth a gift: a way to measure time, so people could know what year it is. He decided to name every year after an animal. But which animals to choose? He invited all the animals to participate in a race. The first 12 animals to cross the river to reach the finishing line would be the winners and would win a spot in the Chinese zodiac cycle.

The Jade Emperor gathered the animals and told them about the race. They would have to first climb a great mountain, go down into a deep valley and then cross a wide, deep and fast-flowing river. On the other side of the river was the Jade Emperor's palace – the finish line.

The cat and rat arrived at the river together. They wondered how they would get across, being such bad swimmers. At the same time, ox, who has poor eyesight, arrived and wondered how he would get across. The rat suggested that he and the cat could jump onto the ox's back and guide him across, all working together. As the three animals got closer to the other side of the river, the cat started to brag about being the first to finish the race. Wanting to be the first to win, the rat pushed the cat into the water. Just as the ox came closer to the finish line, the rat jumped off and raced over the finishing line first, closely followed by the ox. The cat was not a good swimmer, so she could only cling to a rock and watch as the race continued.

After the ox came the tiger, out of breath. The river had fast currents but because she was very strong, she made it to shore and was named the third animal in the cycle. Then came the dragon, flapping his great wings. As the dragon approached the finish line, he saw the poor helpless rabbit clinging to a log that was being washed downstream. The dragon was a friendly animal, so he stopped and gave a mighty puff of breath, blowing the rabbit to shore. Thus the rabbit finished fourth, followed by the dragon in fifth.

Next the horse found himself at the edge of the river. Being a good swimmer, he swam across the river without any problems and when he got out on the other side, he shook himself to dry off. At that moment, the snake appeared! She had hidden herself in the horse's mane and that is how she got across the river. The snake was animal number six and the horse, number seven.

Not long after that, the sheep, monkey, and rooster arrived at the edge of the river together. Seeing that they would not be able to cross the river alone, the three animals worked together to make a raft. Because of their combined efforts, they were able to finish the race. The 11th animal to arrive at the Jade Emperor's palace was the dog. Dogs are great swimmers, but it was his love of the water that delayed him – he couldn't resist playing around in the river for a while. Just as the sun was setting and the Jade Emperor was about to close the doors of the palace, an oink was heard. Pig became the twelfth and the last animal of the zodiac cycle.

Eventually, the cat huffed and puffed her way onto shore, climbed the steps to the palace and knocked on the doors. The Jade Emperor came out and told the cat the all 12 winners had been crowned. This made the cat very angry! And because it was the rat who pushed the cat into the stream, the cat promised that she would be the enemy of the rat forever.

Does your cat chase rats? Now you know why!



# Lion Dances, Dragon Dances

Vancouver's Chinatown hosts one of North America's largest Chinese New Year parades. It is a noisy, vibrant and joyful occasion. If you have been, you may have noticed two different creatures dancing in and amongst the parade and on the streets: the lion and the dragon. Do you know which is which?



The **Dragon** symbolizes power, nobility, wisdom and auspiciousness. Dragon dances are performed at festive occasions, particularly at New Year, to bring good luck. The longer the dragon, the more luck it will bring. Sometimes the Dragon follows a large ball that represents the Pearl of Wisdom.

Dragon dances involve many people who manipulate the long body of the dragon by holding it on sticks above them. Moves are acrobatic, flowing and sinuous to echo the snake-like movements of a dragon.

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**Lions** are considered to be protectors. Lion dances and loud noises are believed to scare away bad luck.

Lion dances bring good fortune to whomever they visit. We often see them at weddings or dancing in front of new businesses to bring good luck. Some people offer green vegetables like lettuce to a lion, who bites them and 'spits' them out. The word 'greens' in Cantonese sounds similar to the word that means 'wealth'. Spitting out the greens means the lion is spreading wealth and good luck.

Lion dances involve two people, one manipulating the head and one forming the body of the lion. Moves originate from Chinese martial arts

