

Chinese New Year



What Is Chinese New Year?

Chinese New Year or Lunar New Year is celebrated every year by millions of people throughout the world and has become a very popular event for people of all cultures and races. Many communities flock to their local Chinatown to witness the joyful festivities and it is the longest and most important holiday for a lot of Asian countries, such as China, Singapore and Malaysia.

Chinese New Year doesn't happen on the same day as the western New Year's Day. This is because it is worked out according to the first day of the Chinese Lunar calendar, which means the year is determined by the movements of the Sun and the Moon. The celebration falls between 21st January and 19th February. In 2022, the new year falls on Tuesday 1st February.

Celebrations

There are certain traditions that are very likely to occur at a Chinese New Year or Lunar New Year celebration. Here are just a few:

Red Envelopes: The colour red is considered to be very lucky in many cultures as it symbolises fortune, good luck and joy. People give each other money in small, decorated red envelopes. It is usually older people who give them to the young in amounts of even numbers. Even numbers are thought to be luckier than odd numbers. But, the even number four is also thought of as bad luck.

Firecrackers: Firecrackers are traditionally made of lots of red paper rolls strung together. When lit, they explode very quickly, one after the other, and create loud popping noises as well as a cloud of red paper shards in the air. However, they are quite dangerous and have been banned in a lot of countries, except for some rural villages in China.

Spring-Cleaning and Debt: It is believed that spring-cleaning your home will sweep away the bad fortune of the old year and any debts should be settled before the new year, ready for a fresh start.

Food and Families: Food is quite symbolic at this time of year. Chicken and prawns represent happiness while noodles represent long life. Dumplings are also eaten. Like Christmas, friends and family all gather together to eat and enjoy each other's company.



Lion and Dragon Dances: These dances are often performed by skilled acrobats under lion and dragon costumes. Like lions and dragons, these costumes are enormous and lots of people can fit underneath them. The dance is accompanied by loud music consisting of drums and cymbals to chase away the evil spirits and bad luck. The dragon dance is often the highlight of a parade in a Chinatown and people flock to see the magnificent show!

Legends

It is said that Chinese New Year started in ancient times, when the Chinese people were hounded by a mythical beast called the 'Nian'. The Nian would visit every New Year's Day to gobble up all their livestock, crops and even people!

Scared and tormented, the villagers left food outside their houses for the Nian, in the hope that it would leave them be once it had been fed.

One day, the villagers noticed that the Nian was afraid of nothing but a small child wearing the colour red. From that day on, red lanterns, firecrackers and scrolls were used to frighten the Nian away and it never came back!



Each new year is named after one of the 12 animals of the Chinese Zodiac. The zodiac is a repeating 12-year cycle and is shown as a wheel, split into 12 sections, each containing an animal. The zodiac and its 12 animals all link to certain years of the Lunar calendar. Last year (2021) was the year of the ox, 2022 is the year of the tiger and 2023 will be the year of the rabbit.

These animals all came to be ranked by a legendary race they all took part in by crossing a river. The rat won the race through trickery and people who are born in the year of the rat are said to be very cunning.

From first to last, the animals finished in this order: rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, goat, monkey, rooster, dog and pig.

Your Celebrations

It is very likely that your local community will be holding some sort of celebration for Chinese New Year or Lunar New Year. Have you ever watched a dragon dance? If not, do you think you will this year?



Rat

2020
2008
1996



Ox

2021
2009
1997



Tiger

2022
2010
1998



Rabbit

2023
2011
1999



Dragon

2024
2012
2000



Snake

2025
2013
2001



Horse

2026
2014
2002



Goat

2027
2015
2003



Monkey

2028
2016
2004



Rooster

2029
2017
2005



Dog

2030
2018
2006



Pig

2031
2019
2007

Questions

1. Which dates does Chinese New Year fall between? Tick one.

- 1st January and 1st February
- 21st January and 5th February
- 21st January and 19th February
- 1st January and 19th February

2. Why is Chinese New Year not on the same day every year?

3. Why is red a significant colour in in many cultures?

Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

4. Why is money given in even amounts?

5. Why do you think lions and dragons are used for the dance in the parade rather than animals such as rabbits, cats and dogs?

6. In your own words, explain the legend of how Chinese New Year began.
