

CHINESE NEW YEAR

Chinese New Year, also known as the Spring Festival, is the most important cultural celebration of the year in China. It celebrates the end of winter and the beginning of the new year, but is also a special time for remembering family members who have died. Because the date is based on the phase of the moon (unlike Western calendars which are based on the sun), the timing of the celebration changes from year to year. It starts on the new moon which usually occurs between late January and late February. There is a three-day public holiday to celebrate Chinese New Year, but the festival lasts for 15 days.

Before the celebration begins, people decorate the outside of their houses with lights, lanterns and special red and gold decorations called Spring Couplets. Some people paint their doors and windows red, as this is considered to be a lucky colour. The inside of the house is carefully cleaned to sweep out any bad luck and make room for good luck in the year ahead.

On New Year's Eve, adults and children wear new clothes bought especially for the occasion. Each family will pay their respects to their ancestors and ask them to send good luck and good fortune for the coming year.

Families then sit down to eat a special meal together, called the Reunion Dinner. Special meats are served, as well as dumplings (a symbol of wealth). In some parts of China, a special cake is eaten and shared with relatives and friends.

When midnight chimes, there is much celebration. Firecrackers are lit; the louder, the better! This is to make sure that the evil spirits are scared away and are too frightened to ever return!

On New Year's Day, the celebrations continue. Chinese children receive a special red envelope with money inside from their parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles. Chinese people will visit their families, or welcome visitors into their own homes.

Everyone then watches the Chinese New Year Parade. The most important part is the Dragon Dance. In China, the dragon is a symbol of wisdom and power. During the dance, a large dragon is carried above the heads of the dancers by long poles. The longer the dragon, the luckier it is!

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