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Chinese New Year



Picture

Chinese New Year is celebrated with colorful dragon costumes

Chinese New Year is the beginning of the year in the Chinese calendar. It is celebrated in China and in Chinese communities around the world.

The Chinese calendar is divided into months based on when the moon appears. The Chinese New Year begins on the first new moon between January 21 and February 20. There is a parade with fireworks and dancers in costumes. A special figure in the parade is a large, colorful dragon costume carried by many people.

The celebration usually lasts three or four days. In China, people hold a three-day Spring Festival at that time.

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Chinese New Year

Chinese New Year is the most important festival of the Chinese calendar. The date of the Chinese New Year is based on the cycles of the moon. It begins between January 21 and February 20. In ancient China, the monthlong festival marked the end of one farming season and the beginning of a new one. Today, the Chinese New Year festival usually lasts only a few days.



Chinese people prepare for the new year by thoroughly cleaning and decorating the house. Decorations include *spring couplets*, red paper scrolls with phrases praising the renewal of life and the return of spring.

Family reunions are an important part of the celebration. Family members join in a festive New Year's Eve dinner. Places are set at the table for absent family members to symbolize the unity of the family. Special foods that symbolize good fortune for the new year are served. For example, rice cakes, called *nian gao*, are a popular food for New Year's Eve dinners. The Chinese word *nian* means *year*, and *gao* means *high*. This food signifies achievement in the new year. Children bow to their parents and grandparents to wish them a long life. Gifts of money in red envelopes are given to children to wish them luck and wealth in the new year.

On New Year's Day, people visit relatives, neighbors, and friends. Dances featuring colorful dragon and lion costumes are often performed on this day. Parades are a popular New Year's custom among Chinese communities in the United States and Canada.

See also [Calendar](#) (The Chinese calendar).

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Chinese New Year



**Dancers in a parade
celebrate the
Chinese New Year.**

Chinese New Year is also called Spring Festival, because winter is ending. Everyone is glad spring is coming. Chinese New Year begins on the first day of the new moon. It ends with the full moon 15 days later. Chinese New Year is held on a different day every year. It can be any day between January 20 and February 20.

Chinese families clean their houses to get ready for the festival. Everyone makes extra food for company. Families put out flowers, oranges, and eight kinds of candy. They write poems on red paper to hang up for good luck.

Families visit friends and relatives. They say good-bye to the old year. On Chinese New Year's Eve, firecrackers go off all night.

On Chinese New Year's Day, everyone wears new clothes and gives gifts. Children get money in red envelopes. Special foods are served for good luck.

The Chinese New Year lasts five days. Dancers dress up in costumes. Musicians play drums and gongs. Dancers holding poles swish a long dragon through the streets. The dragon is made of paper or cloth. It is so long that ten to 50 dancers must hold it up. Firecrackers are lit.

Ten days later, the moon is full and bright. The Lantern Festival is held on this night. Lights are hung on stores and houses. Children go outside with lanterns. People guess riddles. There are more parades, dances, and firecrackers. This is the last celebration of the Chinese New Year.

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Chinese New Year



**Young women
balance on a pole
during a Chinese
New Year parade.**

Chinese New Year is also called Spring Festival, because winter is ending. The holiday is called Lunar New Year when it is celebrated in Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and parts of the United States. Chinese New Year begins on the first day of the new moon and ends with the full moon 15 days later. The Chinese calendar is not the same as the Western calendar, so Chinese New Year falls on a different day every year. It may be celebrated any time between January 20 and February 20.

Preparing for the Chinese New Year

Weeks before the celebration begins, Chinese families clean their houses. Stores will be closed for the holiday, so everyone makes food to reheat when company comes. Chicken, fish, and pork are salted and hung to dry. Vegetables are pickled, and duck eggs are preserved.

Families decorate their houses with flowers, plates of oranges and tangerines, and a candy tray with eight kinds of sweets. They hang good luck sayings written on red paper. A picture of Tsao-Chun, the kitchen god, hangs on the wall. Families offer him sweet cakes, fruits, and treats. They want him to think sweet thoughts when he reports on them in heaven.

Celebrating the Chinese New Year

Long ago, people believed that a beast, Nian, would sneak into houses. Another tale said the monster Xi attacked people on New Year's Eve. Chinese New Year's Eve is called *ChuXi*, which means "get rid of Xi." Both stories say the beasts are afraid of noise and the color red. So lights, firecrackers, and

wearing red are important parts of the holiday.

The day before the holiday begins, families visit friends and relatives. They say good-bye to the old year. That night they light incense, make offerings to the gods, feast, and hang a new picture of Tsao-Chun. Firecrackers go off all night.

On New Year's Day, people wear new clothes and give gifts. Children are given *lai see*, which is money in red envelopes. Families remember their ancestors with a banquet. Special foods are served for good luck. A tradition says that anyone who cries on this day will cry all year long, so parents do not scold their children, even if the children get in trouble.

During the holiday, families honor their ancestors and the gods. People also visit friends and relatives. They wish each other good luck and wealth by saying, "Kung Hei Fat Choy."

On the third day, dancers dressed in costume parade with musicians playing drums and gongs. A long cloth or paper dragon is swished through the streets carried by ten to 50 dancers. The dances continue until the holiday ends. Firecrackers, too, are part of the celebration.

Ending the Celebration

Ten days later, the Lantern Festival is held on the night of the first full moon. Stores and houses are decorated with lights. Children go out at night with lanterns. These may be round, red lanterns or unusual shapes like animals or butterflies. People also enjoy guessing riddles. Parades, dances, and firecrackers continue. The Lantern Festival is the final celebration during the Chinese New Year.

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