

# Chinese New Year

## What is Chinese New Year?

Chinese New Year is celebrated every year by millions of Chinese people and is the longest and most important holiday for a lot of Asian countries, such as China, Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia. It has also become a very popular celebration for people all over the world with many visiting their local Chinatown to take part in the festivities.

Chinese New Year doesn't happen on the same day each year, nor is it on what you might know as New Year's Day (January 1<sup>st</sup>). It usually falls somewhere between 21<sup>st</sup> January and the 19<sup>th</sup> February. In 2021, Chinese New Year falls on Friday 12th February.

## Celebrations

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

**Red Envelopes:** The colour red is very lucky to the Chinese as it represents 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.

**Firecrackers:** Firecrackers are usually 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 villages in China.

**Lion and Dragon Dances:** These dances are often performed by skilled acrobats under the lion and dragon costumes. Loud music, consisting of drums and cymbals, is also played 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.

**Spring Cleaning and Paying Back Money:** It is believed that spring cleaning your home will sweep away the bad fortune of the old year and any money should be paid back to anyone who it is owed to.

**Food and Families:** Food is very important at this time of year. Chicken and prawns represent happiness whilst



noodles represent long life. Dumplings are also eaten. Like Christmas, friends and family all gather together to eat and enjoy each other's company.

### Legends

It is said that Chinese New Year started a very long time ago when the Chinese people were being hounded by a strange beast called the 'Nian'. The Nian would visit every New Year's day to gobble up all their animals, crops and even people!

Scared and frightened, 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 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.

The Chinese Zodiac and its 12 animals all link to certain years of the Lunar calendar. Last year (2020) was the year of the rat, 2021 is the year of the ox and 2022 will be the year of the tiger.

In a very famous legend, these animals all came to be ranked by a 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 clever.

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



# Comprehension

1. When is Chinese New Year in 2021? Tick one.

- 1<sup>st</sup> January
- 12<sup>th</sup> February
- 5<sup>th</sup> February
- 19<sup>th</sup> February

2. Name two countries where Chinese New Year is celebrated.

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3. What does the colour red represent in Chinese tradition?

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4. Why do you think people like to pay back any money that they owe before the start of a new year?

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5. Why are prawns, chicken and noodles eaten at Chinese New Year?

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6. How did the villagers stop Nian?

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7. According to the Chinese Zodiac, 2022 is the year of the...? Tick one.

- tiger
- dog
- pig
- dragon

8. Would you like to experience Chinese New Year? Why?

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