

Lunar New Year 2024 Deep Dive - Year of the Dragon

February 10 marks the beginning of the Lunar New Year, a significant holiday for families all over the world in countries such as China, South Korea, Vietnam, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, etc. To prepare for an auspicious year, families clean the house, **feast**, hang lanterns, and more! Read on to learn more about this very important tradition.

What are people celebrating?

Unlike the Western Gregorian calendar, many people use the **lunisolar calendar**, which is based on the **cycles of the moon**. The Lunar New Year is the first day of the lunisolar calendar, with a focus on welcoming the new and good by purifying the household.

When is the LNY?

The festival starts on the first new moon of the year and ends with the full moon, which is a cycle that lasts **roughly 15 days**. Typically, the LNY falls anywhere between Jan. 21 and Feb. 21. During this time, many people take care not to wash or cut their hair – the Chinese character for “hair” is the same character for “prosper,” so it’s considered bad luck!

When did people in the U. S. start celebrating the LNY?

Throughout the early 1800s, Asian immigrants were forced to hold secret LNY festivities to avoid discrimination. In 1860, however, the first **public** celebration was held by the Chinese community in San Francisco, complete with **lion dancing** and parades. Today, the **San Francisco Chinese New Year Celebration** remains a hugely important annual event.

How do people all around the world celebrate this day?

In most Asian cultures, there is a shared focus on spending time with family, wearing traditional clothing, and respecting superstitions to **maximise prosperity**. In Korea, people don *hanbok*, eat rice cakes, and play traditional games. In China, children are given **red envelopes** full of money, and people wear new clothes to symbolise a fresh start. Vietnamese families also exchange red envelopes and wear traditional *áo dài*, while Singaporeans wear red (a lucky color, as you may have noticed) and invite lion dancers to their homes.

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What is the story of the Chinese zodiac?

Are you familiar with the origins of the Chinese zodiac (生肖)? Everyone is assigned an animal according to their **birth year**. The story comes from a classic myth, where the Jade Emperor (玉帝) wanted to create a way to measure time, and organized a race. The first twelve animals to swim across the river would be awarded with a spot on the Zodiac calendar.



The first animal to arrive across the river was the **Rat**, who asked the kindly **Ox** to carry him across and leapt off just as both animals reached the riverbank. The powerful **Tiger**, nimble **Rabbit**, and righteous **Dragon** followed. Then came the **Horse**, who was spooked by the slithery **Snake** at the last moment and ended up in seventh place. The **Sheep**, **Monkey**, and the **Rooster** followed, having worked together to teach the bank. The **Dog**, a supposedly good swimmer, had gotten distracted while playing in the water and scrambled for eleventh place. Finally, the last animal – the **Pig** – made it across the finish line.

What's this year's Zodiac?

This year is the Year of the Dragon. In the Chinese zodiac, the dragon symbolizes **strength**, health, and good luck. People who are born in the Year of the Dragon are said to be **charismatic** leaders, with abundant intelligence and confidence.

To everyone born in 1976, 1988, 2000, or 2012 – congratulations! It's your year!

