

## MEDIA INFO

### CHINESE NEW YEAR

Chinese New Year, which falls on 8 February this year, is the most important celebration for Chinese people all over the world. It is also known as the Lunar New Year as it is based on the lunar calendar as opposed to the Gregorian calendar.

According to Chinese astrology, 2016 is the year of the Monkey. Chinese New Year starts with the new moon on the first day of the new year and ends on the full moon, 15 days later. The 15<sup>th</sup> day of Chinese New Year is the Lantern Festival (or *Chap Goh Mei*).

Various interesting legends have surfaced over the years to explain the origin of this celebration. Many agree that the word *Nian*, which means “year” in Chinese, was originally the name of a ferocious beast that preyed on people on the eve of new year. To scare *Nian* away, the people pasted red paper decorations on windows and doors, and set off firecrackers, as *Nian* was afraid of the colour red, the light of fire and loud noises. Therefore, at the end of every year, they repeat these rituals which have been carried on from generation to generation.



Legend also has it that the ancient Chinese asked a lion for help. The lion wounded *Nian*, but it returned a year later to scare the people. This time, the lion couldn't help as it was guarding the emperor's gate. So, the people used bamboo and cloth to fashion an image of the lion. Two men crawled inside, pranced and roared, and frightened *Nian* away. This explains the Lion Dance, one of the most impressive sights during Chinese New Year.

The phrase *Guo Nian*, which may mean, “survive the *Nian*”, is used to mean “Celebrate the (New) Year”. The word *Guo* in Chinese means “to pass”. Till today, the customs of having red paper decorations and firecrackers are still observed by the Chinese community.

#### MALAYSIA TOURISM PROMOTION BOARD

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## CHINESE NEW YEAR CELEBRATION IN MALAYSIA

The New Year season starts early in the twelfth month of the previous year and lasts until the middle of the first month of the new year.

Preparations begin about a month before Chinese New Year, where the Chinese shop for decorations, food and drinks, new clothing, groceries and tidbits. Chinese New Year songs are heard in shopping complexes and there are many seasonal sales and promotions. Chinatown at Petaling Street is an ideal place to experience the excitement of the pre-festive celebration.

It is customary to spring clean the house to sweep away any trace of bad luck and make way for good luck and fortune. Some families even renovate their houses or give them a new coat of paint. After that, the houses are decorated with paper scrolls and couplets inscribed with blessings and auspicious words like happiness, longevity, and wealth.

Long before the eve of Chinese New Year, people living far away from their families will begin to prepare for their journey home. Traffic jams build up on highways while airports, bus terminals, and train stations are normally packed.

No matter how tiring the journey may be, it is expected for family members to gather around the table for their Chinese New Year eve reunion dinner, the most important meal of the year. After dinner, family members spend the night playing cards, *mahjong*, watching TV programmes dedicated to the celebration, or just have a good time catching up with each other.

On the first day of Chinese New Year, ritual homage is offered to ancestors and reverence is paid to the gods. New clothes are worn and younger family members greet their elders saying *Kong Xi Fatt Chai* (Mandarin) or *Kong Hei Fatt Choi* (Cantonese), meaning "congratulations and prosperity". In return, they receive *ang pow*, a red packet containing cash which is given by married couples to children and singles.

The seventh day of Chinese New Year is known as "everybody's birthday". On this day, the Chinese will eat *yee sang*, a combination of raw fish, pickled ginger, shredded vegetables, lime and various sauces. This meal is supposed to bring prosperity and good fortune to those who eat it.

On the eighth day, the Hokkien-speaking community enjoy another family reunion. At midnight, they pray to *Tee Kong*, the God of Heaven. On the ninth day, numerous offerings are set out in the forecourt or central courtyard of temples to celebrate the birthday of the Jade Emperor. The 15<sup>th</sup> day is *Chap Goh Mei* which marks the end of Chinese New Year's celebration.



During Chinese New Year day and several days that follow, many Chinese families often hold open houses. This is the time when relatives and friends, regardless of their race and religion, will visit one another, exchanging good wishes and gifts like tangerines (called *Kam* in Cantonese, meaning “Gold”) and other traditional New Year delicacies.

Chinese New Year open house, like other major celebrations in the country, is also held on a national level to enable all Malaysians and tourists to join in the celebration. The open house concept bears testimony to the fact that tolerance and mutual respect are observed in this multi-racial country.

Although the customs and traditions of Chinese New Year vary from place to place in the world, the spirit of the celebration is similar: to have peace, good health, happiness and prosperity in the year ahead.

ENDS

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**MALAYSIA TOURISM PROMOTION BOARD OR TOURISM MALAYSIA** is an agency under the Ministry of Tourism & Culture, Malaysia. Tourism Malaysia focuses on the specific task of promoting Malaysia at all levels. Since its inception, Tourism Malaysia has grown by leaps and bounds and it has emerged as a major player in the international tourism scene. In 2014, Malaysia registered 27.4 million tourist arrivals and RM72 billion in receipts, making tourism its second largest foreign exchange earner.

Through the Tourism NKEA (National Key Economic Area), collaborative efforts between the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, other Government agencies and the private sector have been enhanced to help secure Malaysia’s position as a leading tourist destination and achieve the country’s target of 36 million tourist arrivals and RM168 billion in receipts by 2020.

The targets set under the Tourism NKEA will be achieved through the implementation of twelve Entry Point Projects (EPPs) clustered under five themes: Affordable Luxury; Nature Adventure; Family Fun; Events, Entertainment, Spa and Sports; and Business Tourism.

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