



CHINESE NEW YEAR BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND PLANNING

Dates

- Chinese New Year traditionally lasts for fifteen days, but the public holiday in China usually lasts for three days. The festival is fixed by the Chinese lunar calendar of twelve-year cycles, each named after an animal, and begins with the first new moon sometime between mid-January and mid-February. The predicted dates for the next four years are:

2005 – 9 February

2006 – 29 January

2007 – 18 February

2008 – 7 February.

- As with all festivals that are fixed by lunar calendars, you should check the exact date before your celebration. The word for 'month' and 'moon' are the same in Chinese because they mean the same thing – a month is one cycle of the moon, with the full moon appearing on the fifteenth. Consequently there are 354 days in the year, which means every two or three years an extra month has to be added. This is why it is difficult to predict the actual day of a festival in advance.

Customs and traditions

- Preparations for Chinese New Year begin early, with the house being thoroughly cleaned in readiness. People send New Year cards (the tradition for these preceded Western greeting cards by some two thousand years) and, three weeks before the festival, they eat a special dish called jewel rice. This consists of sticky rice with eight additional ingredients to represent the jewels. The extra ingredients could be walnuts, almonds, raisins, dried apricots, melon seeds, lotus seeds, sweet red and yellow bean paste and dates. It is a colourful, fun festival where families aim to be together over the holiday.



Religious beliefs

- Symbols are important in Chinese festivals, and New Year is no exception. The dominant colours are red, which symbolises good luck, and gold, symbolising prosperity. Chinese New Year has been celebrated for more than 3 000 years, and is a time when farmers thank the gods for the last harvest and pray for a good harvest in the coming year. People make offerings of sweet food and honey to paper kitchen gods which have been hanging up in the house for the past year. This is in the belief that, when the god goes to heaven to report on the behaviour of the family, he will say sweet and pleasant things about them, or else his mouth will be so sticky he will not be able to speak ill of them.