

Chinese New Year 2013 rings in Year of the Snake

The first day of the Chinese New Year – February 10, 2013 – is the most important of Chinese holidays, celebrated by over 1.3 billion people in China and by millions of ethnic Chinese around the world.

It's a celebration that lasts for 15 days, culminating with the Lantern Festival, which is celebrated at night with lantern displays and children carrying lanterns in a parade.. Each year is associated with one of 12 animals in the Chinese zodiac. For 2013, it's the Year of the Snake. Gong Xi Fa Cai! That's the traditional Chinese New Year greeting that means "wishing you prosperity" in Mandarin. The Chinese calendar is based on a combination of lunar and solar movements. The lunar cycle is about 29.5 days. In order to "catch up" with the solar calendar the Chinese insert an extra month once every few years (seven years out of a 19-yearcycle). This is the same as adding an extra day on leap year. This is why, according to the solar calendar, the Chinese New Year falls on a different date each year. Chinese New Year celebrations traditionally lasts 15 days, from the first day (during a new moon) to the 15th day (a full moon). Each day holds a special significance that varies according to local traditions. But first, before the arrival of the new year, homes are thoroughly cleaned to sweep away ill fortune, and to welcome good luck. New Year's Eve and New Year's Day are celebrated as a family affair, a time of reunion and thanksgiving. The celebration was traditionally highlighted with a religious ceremony given in honor of Heaven and Earth, the gods of the household and the family ancestors. The sacrifice to the ancestors, the most vital of all the rituals, united the living members with those who had passed away. Departed relatives are remembered with great respect because they were responsible for laying the foundations for the fortune and glory of the family. The presence of the ancestors is acknowledged on New Year's Eve with a dinner arranged for them at the family banquet table. The spirits of the ancestors, together with the living, celebrate the onset of the New Year as one great community. The communal feast called "surrounding the stove" or weilu. It symbolizes family unity and honors the past and present generations.