

What is the holiday of Lunar New Year? What is the lunar solar calendar and why is it important in many countries around the world? What countries and cultures celebrate Lunar New Year? And what are some of the Lunar New Year traditions? We'll learn the answers to these questions and many more in today's episode on Lunar New Year.

Welcome to Wiser World, a podcast for busy people who need a refresher on all things world. Here we explore different regions of the globe. Giving you the facts and context you need to think historically about current events. I truly believe that the more we learn about the world, the more we embrace our shared humanity.

I'm your host, Allie Roper. Thanks for being here.

The holiday of Lunar New Year is celebrated by billions of people around the world every year and learning about this holiday is so much fun. This episode is going to be short and sweet. It's designed for people who really don't know much about this holiday, but want to be a little more educated. And learning about holidays is always a good time.

So, let's get started. Let's get into it. This is a good one. Here in the United States where I live, our calendar system is called the Gregorian calendar. It was created in 1582 by Pope Gregory the 13th. It replaced the calendar that the Romans had used since 45 BC. And this calendar has leap years. It's roughly 365 days long.

It, you know, works with the earth's revolution around the sun. And most parts of the world use this calendar. And even in the Asian countries we're going to talk about in this episode, most of them have accepted the Gregorian calendar largely. However, many East and Southeast Asian countries still also use China's lunar solar calendar as well.

Now this lunar solar calendar is super old. It can be traced back to the 14th century BC. It's a really old, the calendar is also very complex, but in simple terms, it counts the moon cycles from one Chinese New Year or spring to the next. It also is based off the position of the sun in the sky. Since a new moon comes every 29 12 days or so, the lunar calendar has 29 to 30 days in it.

So instead of having a leap year every four years, like the Gregorian calendar, it has a leap month every three years. So this is why the dates on the calendar, the luna solar calendar, change every year. This calendar guided farming in these regions by dividing the year into solar terms as well, and the year would have four seasons, They were very, very accurate to predict rain, harvest, changing temperatures, just astonishing what people have figured out how to do and have used for centuries and centuries.

Now because the lunar solar calendar has been so important in these countries, many Asian people celebrate their lunar birthdays instead of the date on the Gregorian calendar. Also, many families also pick dates for weddings or for opening a business, like just really important days in their lives, like buying a house, big moments.

They base those days off of the lunar calendar. And for example, in some countries, if the date is not, if it's unfit, according to the lunar solar calendar, they'll pick another date to buy the house or to have the wedding. Right. And for lunar new year, This usually means that that, that holiday of new year usually lands somewhere in January or February in the Gregorian calendar.

And it marks the beginning of the new lunisolar calendar year. So it's basically New Year's, right? Sometimes it's called Chinese New Year because it originated in China, but since it's celebrated all over the world, Korea, Vietnam, Taiwan, Mongolia, even parts of South and Southeast Asia, other countries I'm not mentioning, it's more widely termed.

Lunar New Year, the majority of these countries celebrate Lunar New Year at the same time, but some do it on a different day. It really depends on the country. It's also sometimes called the Spring Festival to welcome in spring. It's seen by many as a chance to kind of leave the troubles of the last year behind.

Usher in good luck in the next year. Something else that's fun about Lunar New Year is that each year is assigned, typically assigned, a Chinese zodiac. There are 12 Chinese zodiac animals. There's the rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, goat, monkey, rooster, dog, And pig. And each one is assigned a year in rotating order.

The zodiac traditions trace way back to over 2, 000 years ago. Some say even further than that. Not all Asian countries use the Chinese zodiac, but most do. And this year, in 2023, Uh, the year is the year of the rabbit. So according to tradition, people born in, from January 22nd, 2023 to February 9th, 2024, that's the lunar year.

They are said to have certain characteristics. So people born under the sign of the rabbit are typically gentle, sensitive, compassionate, fun, modest, merciful. They also like to escape reality and can be impulsive. So the following year, so from February, 2024 to January, 2025, that will be the year of the dragon.

Depending on when you listen to this episode, you should look up what the Zodiac is for this lunar year. And. I think it can be really fun to learn the characteristics of the people that will be born in this year, so just kind of fun. Also, if you're unfamiliar with the zodiacs and you want to do, you want to look up what year you were born and see the zodiac for that year, you can compare what characteristics you have.

Okay, so let's talk a little bit about traditions and festivals and celebrations around Lunar New Year. There are so many, I could never cover them all. And they also really do differ from country to country. Everyone does it a little bit differently, family to family, person to person. So again, can't share them all, but please go look up some on your own.

Let's talk about some of the major ones that seem to be the most across the board. In many Asian countries, Lunar New Year is celebrated for about two weeks, 15 days. And if you stop

and think about it, It could be this long. It could be this long of a holiday because traditionally when the calendar was used for agricultural purposes and people mostly worked in agriculture, they're just keeping themselves alive, right?

This was the time of year when farming was slower. And families could get together and take that time off. Not all countries celebrate for 15 days. Some countries only celebrate for three days. And obviously the world has changed since then, but it can be a longer holiday because of those, because of those reasons, there are a lot of traditions that go into Lunar New Year and a lot of them have to do.

With luck, which we'll talk more about in a minute. One of the first things that people do around Lunar New Year time is they deep clean their house. There is this theme of out with the old in with the new. A lot of people buy new clothes at this time of year in many countries, children, teenagers, and unmarried young adults.

They'll often receive red envelopes filled with money from their family members. Um, especially in China, typically coins are not given in these envelopes, only bills. And people are to give crisp new bills. That's like good taste. They never give any amount that has the number four in it. Because in Mandarin, the word four sounds like the word death.

So That's not good luck. Children receive these envelopes with both hands and speak a blessing to the giver, like a phrase that wishes them safety and health and happiness and good luck. And the receiver, the child or the young adult that's unmarried, They never open the envelope in front of their family members.

Again, that's bad manners. So the envelopes are kept and they are said to bring good luck. For decorations, families typically decorate windows with red and gold paper cuttings. Red is the color of good luck. So that is why it's so heavily used in Lunar New Year. People like to dress in these colors too.

Typically people do not wear black or white because these are funeral colors, which again is said to bring good luck. Another tradition with Lunar New Year is usually a big family reunion dinner that kicks off the holiday. It's really important for families to be together during this time. In China, there are often news reports of traffic jams.

Millions and millions of people heading home to be home for the holidays. And each part of this meal is typically very symbolic, and it's a lot of fun to look up different countries and the different symbolism of the dishes on the table in China. For example, they have a whole fish that represents abundance and brings good luck and fortune in Korea.

They have a special rice cake soup that they eat. Rice cake is definitely a theme in many countries. In other countries, dumplings are very important parts of the meal. Mandarins, or the little oranges, the cute little oranges, they are also eaten as a symbol of prosperity. They're given to each other and they're eaten.

Families often burn incense in honor of their ancestors during this time together as a family as well. When I was researching Chinese New Year's traditions, one thing I thought was really interesting was that the whole family, from young to old, sweep the floor as a symbol to cast out last year's negativity.

They often have fireworks at midnight, and then on New Year's Day, there is often a huge parade where dragons and lions and other symbolic figures dance down the street. The lion and dragon dances are symbols of good luck. And prosperity and these dances are absolutely amazing. They have lion and dragon dance competitions.

The dances, the dancers do absolutely incredible acrobatic feats. It's incredible. If you haven't seen a video of a lion dance, I highly recommend looking one up. Again, just mind blowing what these people can do. In China, the Lunar New Year celebrations, again, they last 15 days. And on that 15th day, they have the Lantern Festival.

There are also a lot of religious and non religious traditions with this. But some of them are, they light lanterns, there are riddles, they eat rice balls, there are lion dances. In some neighborhoods, children carry lanterns around the neighborhood to show the end of the celebration of Lunar New Year.

Everyone gets out, everyone goes out into the streets that night. And I read that in ancient China, women usually weren't allowed to leave the house. But on this particular night, they could walk freely and play games and talk with the men. And so sometimes the Lantern Festival is called the true Chinese Valentine's Day, uh, because of this.

I also read quite a few stories written by people who grew up celebrating Lunar New Year, and many say it was the most magical time of the year for them. Let's stop there for now. But if your interest is piqued and you want to learn more about this holiday, there are so many great resources out there, especially children's books.

Lots of great, beautifully illustrated books written for children that children and adults would enjoy about this amazing holiday celebrated by so many people around the world. So go check some out if you have learned anything today, please share this episode with someone that you love. And I really appreciate you leaving reviews on Apple podcasts and Spotify that helps people to find the podcast.

If you're interested in keeping up with, with what's going on in the podcast, I have a free email list that you can check out. Get on, it's on my website, wiserworldpodcast.com. Just go on there, sign up for the email. And that's where I send new episodes and updates about the podcast. If you are celebrating Lunar New Year this year, I hope you have a great one.

And until next time, let's go make the world a little wiser.