

Chinese New Year

Culture & Traditions



For centuries, Chinese in China have depended heavily on the almanac to determine the weather and seasons for seed planting and crop harvesting, as China is primarily an agricultural country. Therefore, farmers could plan their harvest and planting of new seeds.

Winter was definitely a harsh season in ancient China, and it was a period of hibernation. In preparation for winter, where there was no fresh food to eat because farmers were unable to plough their land, they would preserve their meat by waxing them in autumn, as the northerly wind blew.

And as they stayed indoors to rest and awaited the arrival of spring, it was also a time to clean up their houses and the prayer altar. This major cleaning is known as "spring cleaning".

The arrival of spring is a big deal for the Chinese, having survived the extreme conditions of winter. Known as Chinese New Year or Spring Festival, this celebration marks the beginning of everything new, including plans and goals, and especially, new hopes for the coming year.

Foreword

Nolee Ashilin Radzi

State Executive Councillor for Tourism, Health and Culture

The much-anticipated Visit Malaysia Year 2014 (VMY2014) campaign kicked off in a grand fashion on Saturday, January 4 at Dataran Merdeka, Kuala Lumpur. It was accompanied by fireworks and a fascinating presentation on Malaysia's rich racial and cultural diversity with the iconic Sultan Abdul Samad Building as backdrop. Officiated by Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, this fourth edition of Visit Malaysia Year campaign is themed "Celebrating 1Malaysia Truly Asia" with the Proboscis Monkey as the official mascot. In line with this theme, more than two hundred exciting events and festivals have been lined up for the entire year to attract more tourists to our shores.

Perak is not left behind as we also have a packed Calendar of Events, which can be found on Page 4 of this newsletter. We kicked off the year with a bike ride around the Royal town of Kuala Kangsar and in February, we will be hosting the Arts and Culture Fiesta at Royal Belum.

Some other events of international repute planned for the year include the Ipoh International Waiters Race, Pesta Laut Pangkor, the Royal Belum World Drums Festival and Ipoh International Run.

Minister of Tourism and Culture, Dato' Seri Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz, during his speech at the launch, urged all Malaysians to come together in ensuring the success of VMY 2014. With a likable concept of "We are the H.O.S.T." (Heart, Open, Smile and Together) the stage is set for a very exciting and fun-filled year.

With this in mind, I implore upon all Perakeans to join hands and help realise the Government's 2014 target of 28 million in tourist arrivals and RM76 billion in tourist receipts. Let's do our part although most will be busy with Chinese New Year preparations.

And for those of you who are celebrating this auspicious festival, I wish you a Happy and Prosperous Chinese New Year. "Gong Xi Fai Cai".



Reunion dinner

Spring Festival is a celebration that spans a total of 16 days, from the last day of the year according to the Chinese Lunar Calendar, until the fifteenth day of the New Year.

The final day of the lunar year is celebrated with a reunion dinner, where every member of the family is expected to return to the ancestral home to join in the occasion with the elders and to usher in the New Year. It is the time for the entire family to gather together.

The reunion dinner is also a time when the younger generation shows filial piety to the elders.

The patriarch or matriarch, in his absence, would begin eating before the rest of the family. Feasting on traditional food with 'lucky' sounding names, compulsory dishes would be fish and meat, to signify "extra" for the coming year. More food is prepared to be purposely left over for the following day.

After dinner, the elders would distribute *li xi* to the younger members of the family. *Li xi* is money stuffed inside a small red envelope given to someone younger, usually unmarried, to wish him or her well. In Malaysia, *li xi* is commonly known as *ang pow*.

Taoist master from Ipoh's Loong Thow Ngam temple, Sifu Lee Sooi Fong, said, "Traditionally, this *li xi* was placed under the pillow of the recipient, or on the dresser. It was supposed to be a surprise, a form of encouragement and reward, but also blessings. It is the wish of the elder to see improvement in the young in the coming year."

Besides a reunion dinner, some non-Christian Chinese families would also set up an altar in their compound to invite the God of Wealth into their homes.



The giving of "ang pow"

As said, *ang pow* is given out by the elders after the reunion dinner, or in some families, also on the morning of the first day of Chinese New Year. The amount to be placed in the red envelope, usually new banknotes, is of no importance, but it has to be an even number in terms of amount AND the number of notes. Also, the amount should increase year by year.

In the old days, *ang pow* was only given to those who were still single, but in modern times, parents continue to give *ang pow* even to their married children simply because it is a wish for better things to come for the younger ones. At the same time, children would also return an *ang pow* to their parents to wish them good health and longevity.

As you can see, the giving of *ang pow* is no longer restricted by marital status.

"Gong Xi Fai Cai"

Prior to Chinese New Year and during the whole festivity, Chinese wish each other "Gong Xi Fa Cai" or "Kung Hei Fatt Choy" in Cantonese, which means "Wishing prosperity unto you." While this has become the norm, this is not and should not be the only greeting. There are many wishes that one could say, and it should be relevant to the recipient. For example, it is more appropriate to wish a young adult success in his career, or an elderly person, good health and longevity.

Chinese New Year greeting cards

With modern technology and the convenience of internet and mobile phones, fewer people take the trouble to physically send out Chinese New Year greeting cards. These cards were first replaced by eCards, but short video greetings sent via mobile applications such as WhatsApp and WeChat are more common now.

However, former youth community leader who has a special interest in Chinese culture and traditions, Ngau Wu Chong, believes it is still relevant to send out Chinese New Year cards because it shows a sense of respect and closeness.

"These cards can be used as New Year decorations, and later be kept as souvenirs. Physical greeting cards are definitely more meaningful, and better appreciated, especially by senior folks," said Ngau.

Spring Festival: 1st day of Chinese New Year

One of the most significant days on the Lunar Calendar, everyone who celebrates Chinese New Year will be dressed in their best, not only in red-coloured clothes, but in new ones too, to welcome the New Year. Red is the colour of choice during this season because of its 'yang' energy. According to Dato' Ooi Foh Sing, President of Ipoh Chinese Chinwoo Athletic Association, after praying to deities at the altar at home, there will be a tea ceremony, where, as the patriarch of the family, his children and grandchildren would queue up to serve him tea. Not just the normal Chinese tea, but with red dates added in, to signify sweetness for the coming year.

This is when Dato' Ooi would again, give out an *ang pow* to the younger members of the family.

As the President of Ipoh Chinese Chinwoo Athletic Association, an association internationally known for their traditional lion and dragon dance performances, the troupe's first stop is the house of Dato' Ooi, where there would be a lion dance.

He said, "According to Chinese mythology, a beast known as *Nian* would come out of hiding each spring to attack people, especially kids. Despite its ferocity, *Nian* is afraid of loud noises, light and the colour red. Therefore, the din of the lion dance and the setting off of firecrackers serve to chase away the imaginary beast."

Some families will pray at the temple, and some choose to observe a vegetarian diet on this day.



2nd Day

- The visiting of relatives and friends begins on Day 2. Of course, one doesn't arrive empty-handed and the host has to reciprocate because it is Chinese culture to give, and not only to take. This exchange of gifts is also a way to renew friendship ties.

This is also the day to visit the in-laws, usually with a hamper basket containing mushrooms, fruits, a bottle of liquor and in the olden days, even a pair of live chickens. Obviously, one must not forget the *li xi*, the bigger the better. This is to show that their daughter has married well, and her parents need no longer worry about her.

4th & 5th days

- Traditionally, Chinese businessmen would resume their businesses either on the fourth or fifth day of Chinese New Year. Even for bosses who would like to take a longer time off work, the superstitious ones would still symbolically start their year's business by, for example, opening their shop for a couple of hours in the morning because it is of utmost importance to resume business at an auspicious date and time to ensure continued growth and success.

7th day

- The seventh day of Chinese New Year is known as 'Ren Re' (in Mandarin) or literally translated as "the day of humankind". Legend has it that human beings were created from mud on this day by Goddess Nu Wa.

It is yet another occasion to celebrate with a huge feast, only this time, with the tossing of yusheng, a dish of various pickled vegetables and slices of fish. It symbolises prosperity, and the wealth and success is shared among all those who tossed the dish together.

It is common for Chinese to wish one another "Happy Birthday" on this day, when one is said to be a year older but wiser, hopefully!



8th day

- Just before midnight, the Hokkien community (Fujian people) will pray to The Supreme August Jade Emperor (God of Heaven), whose birthday falls on the ninth day of Chinese New Year.

According to Taoism, the Jade Emperor is the Supreme Ruler of all Heavens, Earth and the Underworld; Creator of the Universe.

Chinese families, who observe this ritual will also be dressed in new, red attire, engage lion dances and set off firecrackers. Again, it is time to feast, and family, friends and neighbours are welcome to join in the celebration, no matter if they were not from the same clan or even religion.

15th day

- Spring Lantern Festival, known locally as *Chap Goh Meh*, which in Hokkien dialect means "the fifteenth night" is observed on the night of the last day of Chinese New Year. This climax is no less colourful than the first day of Spring Festival, as it is also informally known as Chinese Valentine's Day, although the most romantic day on the Chinese Lunar calendar is actually the seventh day of the seventh Lunar month.

Usually, employers will treat their staff to lunch and then allow them to take the rest of the day off so that everyone can celebrate this special night with their loved ones.

To this day, Spring Lantern Festival is the time for singles to find their significant other, perhaps by participating in ice breaking games. One ritual still practised is the tossing of mandarin oranges into a river or pond by single ladies, whereby single men are then expected to fish the oranges out, and contact the phone numbers written on the oranges.

Chinese New Year food

Food and beverages take up the bulk of the budget of a Chinese family during this celebration. And in their obsessive pursuit for all things good for the coming year, ordinary dishes have been given really fancy names in the hope of being blessed throughout the year.

The Hakka community, for example, would purposely prepare eight dishes for their reunion dinner, simply because "eight" in Cantonese dialect sounds like "prosperity". Other dishes would include oyster, chicken, pig trotters, fish and prawns.

A type of food that can only be found during Chinese New Year is *nian gao*, a type of sticky cake made of flour and sugar, because its name literally translates to "higher every year". Definitely something the Chinese would like to see happen!

Time for charity

Chinese New Year is the best time to give thought to the less fortunate. Many make time to visit orphanages and homes for the elderly to distribute food hampers and *ang paws*. Well wishes from strangers certainly bring joy to these 'forgotten' communities.

Bonding

In these modern times, some Chinese families find it difficult to celebrate Chinese New Year in a traditional way, and some opt for overseas travel during these few days of break from work. Despite the many challenges, family love triumphs over everything else, and most will still make an effort to return home for the reunion dinner and to usher in the New Year together.

Food preparation for the dinner, as well as the making of Chinese New Year cookies and card playing sessions during this celebration create an opportunity for parents and their children, grandchildren and also in-laws to bond. This is a good basis for developing closer family ties that last a lifetime.



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Superstitions

It is said that a Chinese who is not superstitious is not a true Chinese. Although not scientifically proven, there are many "don'ts" that the Chinese observe in their daily lives, particularly so during the first day of Chinese New Year.

Top on the list would be avoiding wearing black clothes because it is associated with death. One also should not get a haircut, sweep the floor, do the laundry, spew foul language, get into an argument or fight, or even cry. One shouldn't have pessimistic thoughts or make negative speeches.

Most importantly, a Chinese will, at all costs, avoid attending wakes or funerals, or making a trip to the cemetery.



Kuala Kangsar People's Fest (26 and 27 April 2014)

Held annually in conjunction with His Royal Highness Sultan of Perak's birthday, the Kuala Kangsar People's Fest is a hive of activity organised with the aim of celebrating the auspicious day with the people. Among the highlights of the festivity are a light procession (pesta panjut), a decorative boat regatta and kite exhibition.

Royal Belum International Drums Festival (3 - 20 April 2014)

The beats of a variety of drums from various parts of the world will reverberate once more for the benefit of visitors. The two-week-long festival will be held in a number of locations in the state and should be a major attraction for music enthusiasts, the world over. Countries invited to participate include Azerbaijan, Egypt, Thailand, Japan, Singapore, Korea, Australia and Malaysia.

Lenggong Carnival (30 June 2014)

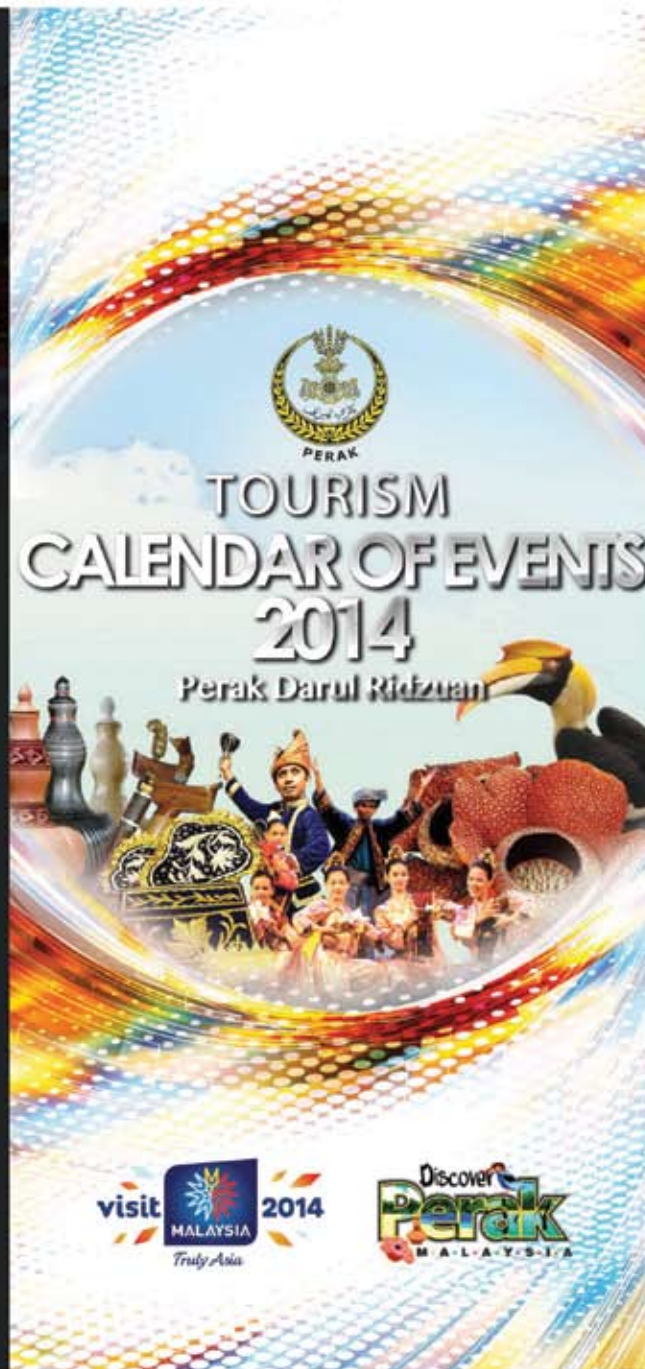
The Lenggong Carnival will coincide with the second anniversary of UNESCO's declaration of Lenggong Valley as a World Heritage Site on June 30, 2012. This very significant historical event is being cherished by all Perakeans.

Ipoh International Run (15 June 2014)

This internationally-acclaimed run, first held in Ipoh in 1985 with a modest participation of 3,400 runners, has grown in strength and stature over a period of time. Last year the event attracted 17,000 participants from the Asean and the Asian regions and as far flung as the United States of America, Belgium, the United Kingdom and Kenya. Of late the dominance of the Kenyans has become more pronounced.

5th International Pangkor Poetry and Folk Songs Festival (11 - 14 December 2014)

Poetry, folk music and songs have been an integral part of the local customs and traditions. Besides being a source of entertainment, they have been a melodious medium for the passage of intimate messages between individuals and groups. Taking cognisance of the importance these communicative arts, the state government has since organised a special event for poets, singers and musicians. The festival has become a major tourist draw since its inception in 2010.

**Pangkor Sea Festival (24 - 27 May 2014)**

The Pangkor Sea Festival is targeted at the family unit as it has plenty to offer everyone - young and old. Besides feasting your eyes on the natural beauty of the island and its surroundings, a number of activities are in place to keep everyone occupied. Topping the list are sea sports designed for beginners and professionals from among us. A musical concert showcasing some of the more renowned local talents is also on the cards. The finale will be a spectacular fireworks display set to brighten the night sky over Pangkor and Lumut.

Fish Catching in Sungai Manik (30 - 31 May 2014)

This event is designed to bring out the latent hunting-gathering instinct in you. This fish-catching competition held in Sungai Manik, an expansive rice-growing region in Lower Perak will not only endear you to the region's green surroundings but provide you an opportunity to see rice field up close and personal. Other activities on the cards include cooking contests and traditional games.

Fishing Competition - GP Joran (3 - 4 May 2014)

This is the third consecutive competition of its kind in the state. It is held at Teluk Senangin in Manjung District and competition among local anglers has been keen in the last two outings. Last year, over 1000 partook in the contest, a record of sorts. The event offers visitors an opportunity to enjoy the rustic charms of Teluk Senangin, a typical fishing village in coastal Perak.

Gua Tempurung Eco-Challenge (4 - 5 September 2014)

Gua Tempurung is one of the most visited and extensive cave systems in the country and is easily accessible to visitors. The Gua Tempurung Eco-Challenge is purpose-made for the adventurous who can take hard knocks in their strides. Participants can expect some rough time navigating the cave system on foot, mountain biking on an undulating circuit and kayaking in a nearby stream. You will leave with fond memories of a physically-punishing outing within a pristine jungle setting.

Royal Belum International Bird-Watching Festival (6 - 7 September)

This much-awaited event will make its debut in September 2014. Its objective is to attract bird watchers the world over. There are 10 species of Hombills indigenous to the Royal Belum forests. Identifying these feathered friends, along with other bird species, will be a challenge worth waiting for. Make a date with the organisers of the festival to satisfy your burning curiosity.

JANUARY

2 - 3 Kayuhan Kuala Kangsar Kuala Kangsar

FEBRUARY

15 - 16 Fiesta Kesenian dan Kebudayaan Royal Belum Royal Belum

MARCH

1 - 2 Cabaran Motorcross Batu Gajah 2014 Tapak Warisan Kapal Korek

8 - 9 Fiesta Memancing Udang Galah Teluk Intan Jeti Riverfront Teluk Intan

APRIL

11 Larian Bendang Menara Condong Padang Speedy 8 Teluk Intan

11 - 13 Pesta Songkran Pengkalan Hulu

12 - 13 Menghillor Di Kuale Persisiran Sayong Kuala Kangsar

25 Ipoh International Waiters Race Ipoh Padang

26 - 27 Pesta Rakyat Kuala Kangsar Persisiran Sayong Kuala Kangsar

MAY

3 - 4 Pertandingan Memancing GP Joran Teluk Senangin, Lumut

17 - 18 Pameran Fotografi Bandaraya Ipoh Town Hall, Ipoh

23 - 25 Dialog Pembangunan Antarabangsa Pangkor Pulau Pangkor

24 Ipoh City Nite Ride Ipoh

24 - 27 Pesta Laut Pangkor Lumut/Pangkor

30 - 31 Moh Menggagor Sungai Manik, Teluk Intan

JUNE

7 - 8 Kellie's Castle Buskers Fest Kellie's Castle Batu Gajah

7 - 9 Royal Belum World Drums Festival Ipoh & Gerik

8 - 9 Pameran Keris Taming Sari & Pedang Cura Si Manja Kini Galeri Sultan Azlan Shah

9 - 15 Festival Kuliner Antarabangsa Ipoh

14 - 15 Moh Wei Jamah Deghoyan Dataran Long Jaafar, Bukit Gantang

15 Ipoh International Run Ipoh

30 Karnival Lenggong Dataran Lenggong

JULY

3 Semarak Ramadhan & Warisan Tradisi Bubur Lambuk Malaysia Ipoh

AUGUST

23 - 1 Sept Karnival Zoo Taiping & Night Safari Zoo Taiping

24 Jamboree Basikal Batu Gajah Batu Gajah

SEPTEMBER

4 - 5 Gua Tempurung Eco Challenge Gua Tempurung & Kg. Jahang Royal Belum

6 - 7 Royal Belum International Bird-Watching Festival Ipoh

13 International Ipoh City Fun Ride Ipoh

19 - 20 Perak Arts Festival Dataran Bandaraya Ipoh

OCTOBER

30 - 2 Nov Cabaran Sukan Air & Sukan Antarabangsa (AWESUM) Gopeng

NOVEMBER

1 - 2 Pencarian Harta Karun Royal Belum Royal Belum

1 - 3 Cars Festival Tanjung Malim

DECEMBER

5 - 7 Festival Perahu Naga Antarabangsa Royal Belum 2014 Tasik Banded, Royal Belum

11 - 14 Festival Pulsi dan Lagu Rakyat Antarabangsa Pangkor 5 (PULARA) Pulau Pangkor

12 - 14 Karnival Kraftangan Kuala Kangsar Persisiran Sayong

12 - 14 Festival Pertunjukan Udara Padang Terbang, Taiping

31 Sambutan Tahun Baru Dataran Bandaraya Ipoh

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