

Lunar New Year in Toronto: Where to celebrate the Year of the Snake in style

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On Jan. 26, the Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto hosted a Lunar New Year community celebration which featured activities such as arts and crafts, Chinese calligraphy, and martial arts performances. (Courtesy: CCGT)

Jan 28, 2025

Today marks the beginning of Lunar New Year, a time of celebration and reflection as Toronto ushers in the Year of the Snake.

Traditionally, the Lunar New Year welcomes well wishes of luck and prosperity into a new season, while also being a time to honour ancestors and deities. The holiday, which has origins that can be traced back thousands of years, is observed today by many countries including China, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, and people from those communities who live across the world.

This year, Toronto is set to embrace the rich cultural traditions of the Chinese community, with festivities, performances, and educational events highlighting the unique symbolism of the snake in Chinese astrology.

With celebrations across Toronto underway, the [Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto](#) (CCCGT) in Scarborough is one of the many hubs leading the way in showcasing the exciting cultural practices that commemorate this special time of year.



WHAT DOES THE YEAR OF THE SNAKE SYMBOLIZE?

Though the snake is often marred across Western cultures for having undesirable traits, the animal is actually a revered sign across the Eastern hemisphere. As the Year of the Snake unfolds, new beginnings are at the forefront of the lunar cycle.

Alan Lam, a chairman of the CCCGT's board of directors, says in Chinese culture, the snake represents themes of longevity, resilience, patience, and most importantly, transformation.

“And as you know, overtime, [snakes] shed their skin, that’s how we symbolize the transformation,” Lam explained in an interview with Now Toronto.

“They plan ahead how to get their food... they’re well calculated before the strike. A lot of people are scared of snakes, of course, because they sometimes strike. We don’t highlight that the snake is flexible... I will say that people born in a year of the snake should be proud, because they’re resilient.”



WHAT HAPPENS DURING LUNAR NEW YEAR?

Lunar New Year is deep-rooted in family traditions, making it an important time for loved ones to gather, reflect on the past year, and share blessings for the year ahead. Families often come together to enjoy elaborate feasts, and honour ancestors through various rituals, such as setting off fireworks or offering prayers.

Lam says exchanging gifts is another cherished tradition, typically money enclosed in envelopes he calls “red pockets.”

“The red pockets have a fortune, and so we pass the fortune to the next generation – the children and grandchildren – to wish them good luck, and as a part of tradition,” he said.

This honours the importance of family, heritage, and togetherness. The passing down of customs, stories, and values during Lunar New Year ensures that these sentiments continue to thrive across generations.

“This is just one of the ways we educate our children, and share this opportunity to pass down our rich tradition,” Lam added.



HOW IS TORONTO CELEBRATING LUNAR NEW YEAR?

Ontario marks February as Chinese Heritage Month, and Lunar New Year celebrations will be taking place across the city throughout the winter season, with tons of events that highlight Toronto's rich cultural diversity.

Lam says the CCCGT has already hosted a series of performances and events over the past few weeks, and looks forward to holding its annual Spring Festival Banquet at the centre this Saturday. He also shares that free Lunar New Year celebrations will continue on Feb. 8 from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. at North York Centre, as well as between Feb. 15-17, where the cultural hub will be taking its traditions to the Aga Khan Museum for Family Day weekend festivities from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.



The Chinatown Centre and Dragon City Mall will also be home to Lunar New Year celebrations this weekend. On Feb. 1, an opening ceremony will start with a traditional lion dance, and several MPs, MPPs, City Councillors and members of the Royal Canadian Navy will be in attendance. The [Chinatown Business Improvement Area \(BIA\)](#) is also providing a variety of live music shows, Kung Fu performances, belly dancing, live calligraphy and more through Feb. 2.

The Chinatown BIA encourages visitors to come down and explore local Chinese restaurants who will be selling exclusive dishes to commemorate the holiday.

Happy Lunar New Year – or, Gong Hei Fat Choy, Toronto!



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