

MY NEW YEAR EXPERIENCE IN TAIWAN



The Chinese New Year is the most important festival and longest holiday in the Chinese world. Celebration begins on New Year's Eve and lasts for 15 days. The Chinese New Year is sometimes called Lunar New Year and it is also referred to as the Spring Festival since it is the beginning of the spring term, which is the first term of the 24 terms on the lunar calendar. The lunar calendar is represented by twelve animals. Each year is represented by one animal. Legend holds that when Buddha summoned all the animals in the forest to come into his presence, 12 came. The first was the mouse or rat; the last was the pig. To honor them all, Buddha named each cycle of the calendar according to the order in which they appeared. The 12 animals in order are: rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, ram, monkey, rooster, dog and pig. This year is the year of the Tiger which is traditionally associated with massive changes and social upheaval. Therefore, 2010 is very likely to be a volatile one both on the world scene, as well as on a personal level.

I got to know about the Chinese New Year when I came to Taiwan. One of our lecturers taught us the significance of the celebration and the advent of the Chinese New Year. I think it is a special and unique festival and an opportunity to reaffirm the bonds of mutual respect and interest that unite families together. It manifests the richness of the Chinese culture and honor

attached to their heritage. It is a time of giving and festivities. People decorate their houses with flowers and red paper cuts on walls or windows. They wear new clothes. Red is a favorite color, it brings good fortune. People eat special foods for good luck. Some people eat long noodles and hope for a long life. Friends visit and bring gifts. Children receive money in red envelopes filled with "lucky money" and I was luck to receive an envelope with "lucky money" from a friend's family. These envelopes are given to children by their family and friends. The red color is used to bring good fortune, and the money inside is used by the children to buy holiday treats. These envelopes symbolize the giving of good fortune. . As part of the preparation every household will be busy spring cleaning as they believe it will sweep away any bad luck accumulated in the past year and have the house ready to receive new luck for the year as the day arrives.

A Chinese New Year celebration would not be complete without fireworks. There are many beliefs about why fireworks are used. One is that the noise wakes up the dragon that will fly across the sky to bring the spring rain for the crops. Another belief is that the noise of the fireworks is supposed to scare away all evil spirits and misfortunes, preventing them from coming into the New Year.

I believe celebrating Chinese New Year is not only celebrated to remember its history or to have fun. The holiday is a privileged occasion for strengthening family and generational bonds, make a new beginning, and to wish each other good fortune for the coming year. It is absolutely essential for a family to get together after a stressful and busy year. More recently, people are busy with their career development and often neglect their seniors and their family. Therefore reunion of families, a day before Chinese New Year, is very important for people to remember and spend time in each others' company to share sad and happy moments. I was honored by the Lee Family of an invitation to join the family to celebrate this joyous and momentous occasion with them. It was a wonderful experience and a rare opportunity of having to meet a Taiwanese family of different generations that is grandparents, parents, children and grandchildren. I had dinner with them and I got to know and for the first time ate really traditional Taiwanese food such as the **Nien Gao** which I loved so much. It was a night

of fun and a memorable one for that matter. The beauty of it all is, there is always someone who waits for you and who wants to be with you during this period.

May this New Year bring in peace, prosperity and good health for both Taiwanese and Non Taiwanese living in Taiwan.

Happy New Year! Xīn nián kuàilè!

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