

## Western New Year

All over the world, people celebrate the beginning of a new year each January 1. For most people, the celebrations begin on New Year's Eve, December 31. People in different countries recognize the start of a new year with different traditions including parties and special foods.

Many cities have special new Year's Eve celebrations. In New York City, more than 1 million people come to Times Square to watch musical performances and wait for the "ball to drop". One minute before midnight, the crowd counts down as a giant ball covered in Waterford crystals and LED lights drops slowly. At exactly midnight, thousands of pounds of confetti rain down on the crowd. Large crowds gather in London's Trafalgar Square and in other big cities. Sydney, Australia puts on a huge fireworks display over the Sydney Harbor Bridge on New Year's Eve. People all over the world stay up until midnight to set off firecrackers, honk horns, and blow noisemakers to "Ring in the New Year".

Many people around the world eat special foods for good luck on New Year's Day. In Mexico, Spain, and some other countries, people eat 1 grape for each stroke of the clock at midnight. Each grape eaten represents a month of good luck in the new year. In Italy, people eat lentils for wealth in the coming year because they look like coins. In the southern U.S., people often eat black-eyed peas for luck and collard greens for wealth. Cabbage is eaten in Ireland and Germany for wealth.

## Chinese New Year

Chinese New Year is the biggest and most important holiday in China. Celebrations last 15 days. The most important days are New Year's Eve (the 1st day of celebrations), New Year's Day (the 2nd day), and Lantern Festival (the last day). The Chinese New Year falls on a different day each year, but is always in late January or early February.

On New Year's Eve, families stay up late to welcome the new year. At midnight, the family eats dumplings filled with meat or vegetables. Dumplings stand for wealth because they are shaped like ancient Chinese coins.

On new Year's Day, families in China enjoy a large feast. Foods eaten include dumplings (for wealth), whole fish (for abundance), long noodles (for long life), and *nian gao* (a sweet cake that stands for new experiences). Throughout the day, people set off firecrackers to scare away evil spirits. Family and friends exchange *hong bao*, or red envelopes filled with money. Red is considered a lucky color. On New Year's Day and every day for the next 2 weeks, Dragon Dances are performed in the streets. A group of 12 or more performers carries a large dragon on poles, making it dance through the town!

The Chinese new Year celebrations end with *yuanxiao*, or Lantern Festival. On this day, towns have a large party under the full moon. Children enjoy making paper lanterns and parading through the streets along with the Dragon Dancers.