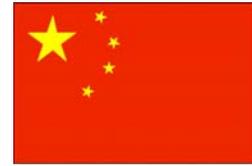


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Spring Festival

In China, the most important festival is the first day of a year in traditional Chinese calendar, i.e. the traditional Chinese New Year, or so called Spring Festival. Generally speaking, the traditional Chinese New Year lags one month behind the Gregorian calendar's new year.



As the date of Spring Festival varies from year to year, this year we will celebrate it on Feb 14th, the same date with the Valentine's day. Isn't it interesting?

Like the Christmas, every Chinese family would get together to celebrate the Spring Festival, which brings great pressure to the public transport. I still remember that during my undergraduate years, I had to follow a queue, often of hundreds meters long, to buy the train ticket back home. During this period, the long-distance buses often raise their prices up to 200% percent!

Strictly speaking, Spring Festival is not just the first day of a year, but a period begins from the early days in the 12th lunar month, and ends at the mid 1st lunar month, somewhat like the period from Thanksgiving to Christmas. During this period, there is winter holiday for students, and a week's break for most people.

At the beginning of the 12th lunar month, families often prepares the so called "Laba porridge", to eat on the 8th day. The porridge is very carefully made, with glutinous rice, jujube berries, lotus seeds, beans and so on, and turn out to be very delicious. It's a great pity that I couldn't go back home on that day since my senior middle school, and couldn't enjoy the great meal.





15 days after the "Laba", we have our Preliminary Eve, on which we sacrifice our kitchen God. It's said that the kitchen God favors sweet food very much, so we often offer maltose to him.

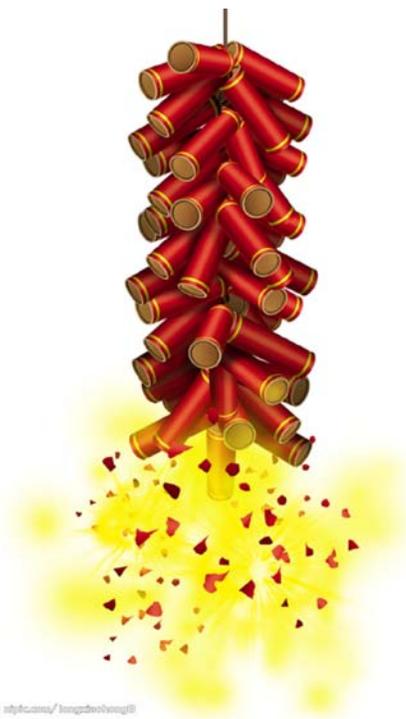
After the Preliminary Eve, people are so busy with the preparation for the Chinese New Year.

It often cost families a lot of money to have a wonderful festival. We shall buy many kinds of staff, mainly materials to make delicious food, including rice, flour, oil, pork, beef, chicken, duck, fish, fruit, vegetables, candies, nuts.....a very long list to be purchased. Other important staff includes new clothes for the whole family, gifts for the young, the elder and relatives, various decorations to beautify the house, and so on.

Before the Chinese New Year Eve, which is called "Chuxi", we are busy with cleaning and decorating our houses, preparing the salty and fried foods. The Chinese New Year Eve is very important, on that day we should paste pictures of gods of doors and wealth as well as couplets on the door panels. I think couplets are unique to China, and really interesting. They are written with Chinese calligraphy with black or golden characters on red papers, longing for a better future or good luck in the coming year.



In the evening, all the family would get together to enjoy a great dinner, much luxurious than usual, to celebrate the coming of a new year. In recent years, Spring Festival party was broadcasted by China Central Television Station on the night of Chinese New Year Eve, and brought great joy to people after the luxurious dinner. Usually we stay into the deep night to welcome the new year, while we are making "jiaozi", or dumplings for the next morning.



On the coming of new year, we burn firework according to custom. It's said that the flash and sound of fireworks explosion can drive away "Nian", a storied fierce wild beast which usually attacked people at the new year eve, before firework was invented. As the story is gradually forgotten by people, the sound of fireworks helps to create a lively atmosphere during the festival, especially for children who are always excited with the successive sounds of crackling.

The early days of the 1st lunar month are time for us to visit our neighbours and relatives. Typically, on the 1st day, we visit our neighbours, and elder relatives in my father's family. On the second days, we visit the elder relatives in my mother's family. And subsequently, we visit the younger relatives in my

father's family, and then mother's family. Relatives not so closed or friends are visited afterwards, according to the convention. The above order origins from our conventional culture that priority should given to male and elder people and their family.

The Lantern Festival in the middle of the 1st lunar year brings an end to the series of celebration of Spring Festival. After Lantern Festival, students begin to return to campus, and the spring semester starts sooner or later. During the Spring Festival period, we have experienced anxious longing, bursting exiting, and continuous joy. Days fly like hours, and the month seems so short. I shall thank this great festival, which has brought so much unforgettable happiness to me.

