

Chinese New Year

MAN PO IS NINE YEARS OLD and lives in Hong Kong. She is looking forward to Chinese New Year, one of the world's most colourful celebrations. Chinese New Year starts on the first day of the Chinese calendar, usually in February. It lasts for 15 days and marks the start of the new year. For many families, it is a time for feasting and visiting relatives and friends, but in the heart of the city, a spectacular procession takes place. The celebrations are based on bringing luck, health, happiness, and wealth throughout the coming year. Chinese families clean their houses thoroughly to rid them of last year's bad luck before the celebrations begin.



STREET PARADE

Thousands of people line the streets of Hong Kong to watch the huge procession of floats in the New Year parade. Dancing dragons and lions weave their way through the crowded streets. The dragon is associated with long life and prosperity. Inside the costume, there can be up to 50 trained martial arts dancers, twisting and turning the dragon's long silk body and blinking its huge eyes.



PEACH BLOSSOM

The Chinese believe that peach blossom is lucky. On market stalls, the delicate blossom is wrapped in tissue paper to stop it getting damaged.



TERRIFYING OX

According to the Chinese calendar, 1997 is the year of the ox. This imposing ox-shaped float has smoke billowing from its nostrils. This year, there are pictures of the ox all over the city, together with the other New Year decorations.

FIRECRACKERS AT HOME

Chinese people believe that evil spirits dislike loud noises, so Man Po and her family decorate their house with plastic firecrackers. These symbolize the deafening noise that real firecrackers make when they are set off. The noise is intended to frighten away the evil spirits and the bad luck which they might bring.



KUMQUAT TREES

Man Po goes with her parents to the flower market in Hong Kong. At the end of the old year, the market is bustling with people wanting to buy plants and flowers which will bring them good luck in the coming year. The Kumquat tree is considered to be particularly lucky because its Chinese name is a play on the word lucky.



A kumquat looks like a miniature orange, but it tastes a little bit sour.



COLOURFUL FRUITS

Tangerines with leaves are the lucky fruits of the New Year because of their bright colour. Odd numbers are unlucky, so people always give tangerines in pairs.



Man Po and her family buy their firecracker decorations from a street market stall. They place them in the window or by the doorway in their home so that other people can see them.

People in Hong Kong are not allowed to set off real firecrackers. Instead, they use plastic firecrackers as decorations.

"My outfit is very traditional. It is made of silk and it is very, very beautiful."



Red is the main colour for clothes and decorations at New Year because it is associated with joy and happiness.

恭喜發財

"I have written Kung Hei Fat Choy in Chinese, which means 'We hope you get rich'. We say that to everybody at New Year. My family and I visit our grandparents on New Year, and we take sticky rice cakes, called *lin guo*, with us. I look forward most to the red packets that we are given on New Year, because they have money inside them. Each packet contains a different amount of money."



Good luck message

Man Po's family name

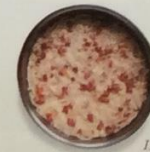


Lucky money packets

"I save all the money that I am given."

LUCKY MONEY

Man Po can hardly wait for New Year's morning when she is given lucky money by her parents and relatives. All Chinese children, and people who are not married, receive money in special red envelopes. Their family name or a good luck message is written on the envelope in gold.



Law pak ko



Lin guo

FEAST TREATS

The biggest treats of the New Year celebrations are the sumptuous feasts. For the first day of New Year, Man Po's family try not to eat meat, because each year is named after an animal. On the other days, they can eat whatever they want. Man Po's favourite foods are *law pak ko*, a savoury white carrot cake that contains dried shrimps, and *lin guo*, a sticky rice cake.

CHINESE HOROSCOPE
The ancient Chinese horoscope has been used for thousands of years to analyse a person's character and predict their future. The horoscope works on a 12-year cycle, with each year represented by a different animal. Man Po was born in 1987, which was the year of the rabbit. This means that she is a pleasant, hardworking, and obedient child. When she grows up, she hopes to be tranquil, generous, and imaginative.



RAT
Friendly, intelligent, and polite



OX
Honest, placid, and considerate



TIGER
Competitive, optimistic, a leader



RABBIT
Tranquil, generous, and imaginative



DRAGON
Strong, energetic, and impressive



SNAKE
Elegant, refined, and confident



HORSE
Friendly, eloquent, and loyal



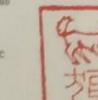
RAM
Gentle, amiable, and sensitive



MONKEY
Independent, astute, and sociable



ROOSTER
Frank, courageous, and good company



DOG
Alert, trustworthy, and faithful



PIG
Calm, tolerant, and optimistic