

Festivals and holidays

Festivals

All the traditional festivals are based on the Chinese lunar calendar which has about 20 to 30 days difference from the international calendar. You will be fortunate if you come to China during one of these festivals, as you will get a glimpse of the traditional Chinese culture, values, and customs.

1. Spring Festival

This is the Chinese New Year in the lunar calendar, usually falling in early February. It is the most important festival in China and for Chinese communities in other countries. Like Christmas Day in the West, this festival is a family celebration where the whole family gathers together for festivities. On New Year's Eve, the whole family sits around tables to have a grand feast and let off fireworks (nowadays fireworks are forbidden in many large cities to prevent fire and injury). The whole celebration will last until the Lantern Festival.

2. Lantern Festival

On the 15th day of the 1st month of the lunar calendar, normally falling at the end of February. During Latern Festival, people traditionally go outdoors to look at various lanterns in the streets or parks and eat round, sweet, rice-flour dumplings.

3. Qingming Festival

Normally this falls on April 5, and is a festival to remember the deceased. On this day, people traditionally go to visit the tombs of their ancestors. If you are in Beijing at this time, you will see school children lay wreaths of flowers before the monument in Tian'anmen Square in memory of martyrs who died in the wars.

4. Dragon Boat Festival

Also known as Duanwu Festival, is a festival to remember the patriotic poet Qu Yuan who drowned himself in the river in 278 B.C. to oppose the rule of the Qin conqueror. Traditionally people rowed dragon boats on the

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river and dropped rice dumplings into the water to feed the fish, in the hope that the fish would not eat Qu Yuan's body.

5. Qixi Festival

Falling on the 7th day of the 7th month of the lunar calendar, the Qixi Festival is also known as Chinese Valentine's Day or Double Seventh Festival. This is the most romantic Chinese traditional festival and there's a romantic love legend about a herd boy (Niu Lang) and a fairy weaver girl (Zhi Nu). After facing opposition to their true love, they are eventually allowed by the Jade Emperor to meet once each year on the 7th of the 7th lunar month. Traditionally, it is quite different from the western Valentine's Day and is a festival mainly for girls. There is not so much emphasis on giving chocolates, flowers, and kisses. Instead, Chinese girls would prepare fruits, melons, and incense to pray for romantic love and a happy marriage.

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6. Mid-Autumn Festival

During this festival, families gather together to have a feast and eat moon cakes while watching the full moon in the sky. The moon cake symbolizes family reunion because of its round shape. It is usually made of wheat flour with fillings of various flavors, very tasty if you have a sweet tooth.

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7. Chongyang Festival

This is a festival for elderly people on the 9th day of the 9th month of the lunar calendar, usually falling in October. According to the yin/yang dichotomy that forms the basis of the ancient Chinese worldview, yin represents the elements of darkness and yang represents life and brightness. The number nine is regarded as yang, hence the name "Chongyang Festival" ("Chong" means "repeat" in Chinese). The ninth month also heralds the approach of winter. It is a time when the living need warm clothing, and filial Chinese sons and daughters extended this to make the festival a time for providing winter clothes for their ancestors. In addition, people customarily climb mountains, appreciate chrysanthemum flowers, and drink chrysanthemum wine.

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8. Winter Solstice Festival

Winter solstice is one of the 24 solar terms in the Chinese lunar calendar and it's the

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shortest day of the whole year. The time will be each December 21st or 22nd. After the Winter Solstice, days in the northern hemisphere will become longer and longer. According to ancient Chinese thought, the yang (positive force) will become stronger and stronger after this day, so it should be celebrated.

Northerners may have dumplings and wontons that day while southerners may eat dumplings made from rice and long noodles. Some places even have the tradition of offering sacrifices to heaven and the earth.

National holidays

- Jan. 1 ---- New Year's Day; 1-day holiday
- The 1st day of the 1st month of the lunar calendar ---- Spring Festival; 7-day holiday
- Usually Apr. 5 ---- Qingming Festival; 1-day holiday
- May 1 ---- International Workers' Day; 1-day holiday
- The 5th day of the 5th month of the lunar calendar ---- Dragon Boat Festival; 1-day holiday
- The 15th day of the 8th month of the lunar calendar ---- Mid-Autumn Festival; 1-day holiday
- Oct. 1 ---- National Day; 3-day holiday

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Other holidays

- Mar. 8 ---- International Women's Day; 1/2-day holiday for women only
- May 4 ---- Chinese Youths' Day; Young people between 14 and 28 normally have 1-day or 1/2-day off.
- Jun. 1 ---- International Children's Day; 1-day holiday for school children under 13.

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Note

The festivals and holidays above are also the peak periods for traveling and shopping. Other times that you will also witness crowds and higher prices are:

- In October, F1 racing events will be held in Shanghai.
- In April and October, Canton Fair will be held in Guangzhou.