

Lunar New Year has begun, ushering in Year of the Snake

Justice Marbury

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Many cultures around the world and communities in Western New York celebrate the Lunar New Year.

The holiday, rooted in lunar calendar traditions, marks the start of a new year based on the phases of the moon. As a result, its date varies annually. This year, the celebration ushers in the Year of the Snake, one of the 12 animals in the Chinese zodiac.

The Lunar New Year is widely observed with family reunions, traditional meals, and cultural festivities. Many view it as a time to honor heritage and welcome prosperity for the year ahead.

When is Lunar New Year?

Lunar New Year's date changes every year since it follows a lunar calendar, according to Gang Liu, a professor of Chinese studies at Carnegie Mellon University.

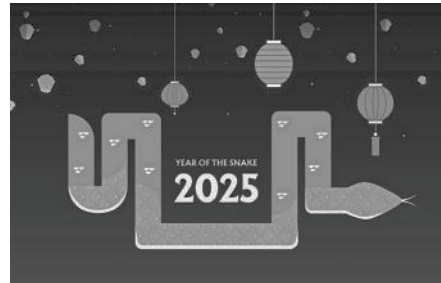
The new year in 2025 falls on Jan. 29 and ends with the Lantern Festival on Feb. 12. Celebrations last up to 16 days; the Chinese public holiday lasts from Wednesday to Feb. 4.

Many Western countries — including the U.S. — use the Gregorian calendar, which is based on a system of 365 days (plus a leap day every four years). Lunar New Year is based the moon's 12 phases. Each phase cycle spans approximately 29 days with the full calendar being about 354 days long. On the Gregorian calendar, the Lunar New Year generally falls during the last 10 days of January or the first 10 days of February, says Chen Yang, a professor of Chinese culture and philosophy at George Washington University.

What is the Chinese Zodiac?

The Chinese zodiac, or Sheng Xiao, is a repeating 12-year cycle of animal signs and their attributes, based on the lunar calendar.

The Lunar New Year marks the transition from one animal to another. The Year of the Dragon, which began on Feb. 10, 2024, ends on Tuesday.



Under the Chinese zodiac consisting of 12 animals, 2025 is the Year of the Snake. ILLUSTRATION: JENNIFER BORRESEN/ USA TODAY NETWORK

Wednesday begins the Year of the Snake. The Year of the Snake last came in 2013.

Who celebrates Lunar New Year?

Lunar New Year is celebrated in many Asian cultures, Xiaoquan Raphael Zhang, the director of the Chinese program at American University, previously told USA TODAY. Among these cultures are Chinese, South Korean, Vietnamese, Singaporean, Malaysian, Filipino and Indonesian.

Each culture has its own name for the New Year. For instance, the Lunar New Year in China is called the Spring Festival, or chunjié. South Korea refers to the Lunar New Year as Seollal. In Vietnam, Lunar New Year is called Têt, which is short for Têt Nguyên Dán.

How long is Lunar New Year?

While the Western New Year lasts just one day, Lunar New Year goes beyond that. In China, Lunar New Year spans from the first new moon to the next full moon, or the fifth day of the lunar month, Zhang previously told USA TODAY.

This begins with the Spring Festival and ends with the Lantern Festival, says Liu. The number of days of celebration varies depending on the country. In South Korea, Seollal usually lasts for three days. In Vietnam, Têt Nguyên Dán is a week long.

— *Information compiled from previous D&C stories plus USA TODAY Network reporting and research; ChineseNewYear.net, History.com.*