



Make this weekend a cracker with New Year celebrations in Beijing

by Yi, Wang 9 February, 2010

Chinese New Year kicks off on February 14, and along with Valentines this weekend calls for something special. Head to Beijing for romance, tradition, parties and culture



The red that dominates Chinese New Year celebrations is considered auspicious, signifying reunion, health, happiness, harmony, peace and prosperity.

If you hadn't noticed that Chinese New Year is almost upon us, first of all pull yourself out from whatever rock you've been living under, secondly read this article, and thirdly get yourself down to Beijing this weekend for one of the Eastern hemisphere's most kicking traditional festival periods. You may think this is a tradition like any other, but China is nothing if it isn't a continually adapting, evolving, progression-chasing pioneer of a nation, and its traditions similarly re-invent themselves with the times.



Temple of Heaven, so behave.

Where to start

In Beijing, every Chinese New Year starts with a gathering at an ancient site. The Temple Fair, long ago a site purely dedicated to spiritual worship, has embraced commerce in its current form, but it is a seminal part of the New Year agenda. Just as Christmas would be far less without Santa, so the New Year party in Beijing would be found wanting without the Temple Fair.

Begin your trip at the Holiday Inn Temple of Heaven hotel, and then head over to the nearby Temple of Heaven, a Taoist temple built in the 15th Century that's less than a 10 minute walk from the hotel. There you can see a re-enactment of the ancient Emperor's classic prayer ceremony. (This is the only place you'll need to mind your Ps and Qs during the whole New Year celebration.) *Getting There: Holiday Inn Temple of Heaven hotel, No. 1 Ding An Dong Li 3rd, South Ring Road, Beijing +86 10 6762 6688.*

Traipsing from one stand to another in the Changdian temple fair is a must, as the street food here is top-notch. When you see strings of haw apples hanging on a bunch of wooden pegs, go ahead and try one. The fair is full of exotic boutiques, lion and dragon dancing as well as acrobatics. (It gets crowded, so prepare to be jostled by the festive throngs.) *Getting There: Nanxinhua Jie, Xuanwu District, Hepingmen, Beijing. Open Hours: 8.30am-5pm.*



Loud and dangerous. We like.

Fire in the sky (and on the ground)

Playing with fireworks can be dangerous, but Chinese New Year wouldn't be the same without the sulfurous smell and ear-ringing crackles of firecrackers. At the point of midnight, explosions will erupt from every corner of the city. Some say the fireworks evoke the spirit of the dragon, a symbol of good fortune in Chinese tradition. Others say the explosions drive away evil. Either way, it's a spectacular (if slightly dangerous) way to get into the party mood. Do watch out as you walk about for the odd stray cracker that could be headed your way.

Dinner of the year

The New Year's Eve dinner is a crucial item on the party itinerary. It's the irreplaceable family reunion feast. Hot dumplings (the embodiment of luckiness) are the staple, and offer a nice nice warm-up during Beijing's freezing winter. Visit Tianjin Bai Jiao Yuan for your dinner of the year, and start from a dish of dumplings with shrimp, crab, and mushroom fillings. *Getting There: 12A Xin Wenhua Jie Tel: + 86 10 6605 9371. Open Hours: Daily 10 am- 2:30pm and 4:30-9:30pm.*

Want to make the dinner experience a little more like home cooking? Head to Guandicun No. 00001, a farm guesthouse located in the outskirts of Beijing. The host will let you and yours make the fragile but yummy dumplings for your dinner. *Getting There: Guandicun village, Yanxizhenxia, Huairou district, Beijing Tel: +86 10 1369 1113 302.*

A Beijing feast isn't a Beijing feast unless there's some roast duck, so look for Dadong Kaoya for crispy yet succulent Beijing duck. *Getting There: Dadong Roast Duck 1-2 Nanxincang Guoji Dasha, 22A Dongshishitiao, Dongcheng district, Beijing, +86 10 5169 0329. Open 11am-10pm.*



The art is on the inside.

798 Art Zone

The 798 Art Zone celebrates its eighth birthday this year. Eight of China's newest generation of artists have teamed up for a show, representing the exciting future of China's contemporary art. With genres including painting, installation, performance, photography and film, the eight separate solo shows are unified as an interactive playground. *Getting There: 798 Art Zone, No.4 Jiuxianqiao Rd., Chaoyang District, Beijing.*

After the firecrackers; after hours

After the firecrackers have died down, and you're looking for some peace and quiet to welcome in the New Year, try Lotus Blue. (*Getting There: Lotus Lane, Ping'an Dajie, Houhai*) For those energetic

nightlife masters, head down to [Coco Banana](#), or [Cargo club](#). When the lights go down, the volume goes up and that means permission granted to strut your best moves. And, just in case you get the munchies, the 148-store chain Guijie will be the only food in town as they're open 24 hours. *Getting There: 6 Gongti Xilu, Gongti Gongti West Gate.*

Old faithful

And while you're here why not take a day out to visit the Great Wall, even if it does mean trekking out of the city in below freezing weather. Besides, after all the hullabaloo a visit to the Mutianyu Great Wall (*Getting There*), will be a nice escape from the madness.

You'll need more than a long weekend to truly experience Beijing, so plan to come back and bone up on where you want to go and what you want to do by picking up a copy of Yutang Lin's *Moment in Peking*. *Where to get: Beijing Foreign Languages Bookstore, 235 Wangfujing Dajie.*