

Chinese Holidays

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Holidays. The holiday season encompassing Christmas and New Years has always been a special time of year for myself as well as many others in the golf business in the Midwest. This has always been a time to spend with family and friends in a relaxed atmosphere away from the trials and tribulations of the golf business. The holidays such as Memorial Day, Fourth of July, and Labor Day were days I never fully enjoyed with the golf course being under attack from golfers enjoying at least one day off from their jobs. The courses still were expected to be in good playing condition regardless of the holiday. For me, these holidays were many times a nuisance for staff and maintenance scheduling. I really never appreciated or seemed to enjoy the in season holidays. Thus, Christmas and New Years always were special and very enjoyable.

Upon coming to Hong Kong, I quickly learned that the Asians truly look forward to and fully enjoy all holidays – including some American holidays. American Christmas is time for celebration. Downtown Hong Kong is closed off to traffic on Christmas Eve and the downtown area turns into a large block party with stages of live music and a fireworks display over Victoria Harbor at midnight. The American Christmas provides the Chinese time off from work to enjoy being with family members. The family is central to most of the Chinese. It is tradition that most Chinese care for their parents until death. The Chinese parents live with their children or live in close proximity to their children so the children can care for their parents. Retirement facilities, assisted living homes, etc. are very few in Hong Kong or China. It is the children's responsibility to care for their parents until they pass away. In Hong Kong, there are 18 holidays recognized by the government, in Red China there are 28 holidays as Chinese New Year covers 15 days in China, while Hong Kong only recognizes 3 days for Chinese New Year. While Christmas is the high point of the holiday season for many Americans, Chinese New

Year is the focal point for the Chinese. New Year's Eve and New Year's Day are celebrated as a family affair, a time of reunion, a wishing of happiness and good fortune, and a time of thanksgiving for last year's gifts. Religious ceremonies and traditions are given in honor of Heaven and Earth, the gods of the household and good fortune, and the family ancestors. During this time departed family members are remembered with reverence and respect for laying the foundations for the fortunes and happiness of the family members to come. The family ancestors are remembered and honored with a fami-

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(Hmmm... Tiger always wears red on Sundays...)

ly gathering and dinner on New Year's Eve. The spirits of the ancestors along with the living celebrate the beginning of a New Year.

Chinese New Year starts with the New Moon on the first day of the New Year and ends on the full moon 15 days later. Chinese legend has it that in ancient times, Buddha asked all the animals to meet him on Chinese New Year. Twelve animals came, and Buddha named a year after each one. He announced that the people born in each animal's year would have some of that animal's personality. Those born in rat years tend to be leaders, pioneers, and conquerors. They are charming, passionate, charismatic, and practical and hardworking.

Red is an important color for the Chinese during the celebration period. Red symbolizes fire, which in Chinese legend will drive away bad luck and bad spirits. A very important tradition is the handing out of Lai See, or Red Envelopes. These envelopes contain new script or money. The amount depends upon the wealth of the giver and the relationship that the giver has to the receiver. Here at

Hong Kong Golf Club I give an envelope to everyone of my staff members and other people that I may come in contact with. This year I gave out almost 200 envelopes during the four days that covers the celebration of New Year here in Hong Kong. The receiver of the gift acknowledges the gift by saying "Gung Hay Fat Choy." This is a wishing of health and happiness to the giver of the envelope for the upcoming year.

Chinese New Year is centered heavily on the family. On Day 2, the Chinese pray to their ancestors as well as to all the gods.

Day 3 and 4 is for the sons-in-law to pay respect to their wives parents. The fifth day is called Po Woo. On that day, people stay home to welcome the God of Wealth. Visiting of families and friends is prohibited as legend has it that this will bring bad luck to both parties. From day 6 through day 10, the Chinese tradition is to visit relatives and friends. This is a

visit of friendship and wishing of happiness and good fortune throughout the year. This is also a time to go to the temples to pray for good fortune, health and happiness. As you can see, the family, friends, health and happiness are very central to the Chinese New Year. The seventh day is considered the birthday of humans. Noodles are eaten to promote long life, and raw fish eaten for personal success and wealth. Day eight is marked by having a family reunion dinner, and at midnight prayers are offered to Tian Gong, the God of Heaven. Day nine is for making offerings to the Jade Emperor. During the period of days 10 through 12, friends and relatives get together for dinners and wishing of happiness and good fortune. Day 13 is to eat simple rice congee and choi sum, or mustard greens for cleansing the bodies system of impurities. Day 14 is devoted to preparing for the Lantern Festival, which is held on the evening of Day 15 of the celebration period. The Lantern Festival is celebrated with children carrying lanterns in a parade, and

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a fireworks display at midnight.

Prior to New Year's Day, the Chinese decorate in the same manner that we in America decorate for Christmas. Central to their decorating are fresh flowers and oranges. Live blooming plants symbolize rebirth and new growth. Flowers are believed to symbolize wealth and happiness. Having a plant bloom with flowers on New Year's Day is considered very lucky as it foretells a year of extreme wealth and prosperity. Flowering plants are closely associated with superstition that is a good omen for a year of happiness and good fortune to come. Oranges and tangerines are symbols for great happiness for the New Year. So, instead of the pine tree as used in America for Christmas, the tangerine of miniature orange tree is the tree used to symbolize the Chinese New Year.

Many traditions and superstitions abound surrounding Chinese New Year. The entire house or flat is cleaned before the start of the celebration period. This symbolizes getting rid of the old and bringing in the new. In sweeping floors,

superstition has it that if you sweep the dirt out the door, you will sweep one of your families away. The dirt is swept to the center of the room, picked up, and carried away. All dirt and garbage is to be taken out the back door.

Preparing for New Year's is similar to Spring Cleaning that Americans do after a long, hard winter. On New Year's Day, washing your hair is washing away good fortune. Crying on New Year's Day may mean crying all year. Do not use scissors on New Year's Day; this is cutting off your good fortune for the New Year.

Many of these customs, superstitions, and celebrations are still followed closely in China. The New Year's period of celebration is still 15 days long. With preparing for New Year's, observing the 15-day



New Year's Lunch Buffet for Hong Kong CC's Grounds Staff.

period, and getting back into a work mode, the month of February in China is basically a month of very little work activity. Here in Hong Kong the celebration period is recognized as only 4 days in length. Many of the Chinese still observe the 15-day period, but officially the period is 4 days in length. For me, this has been a great learning experience of another culture and a way of life. Truly another adventure in life.

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