

# New Year's celebrations

From around the world

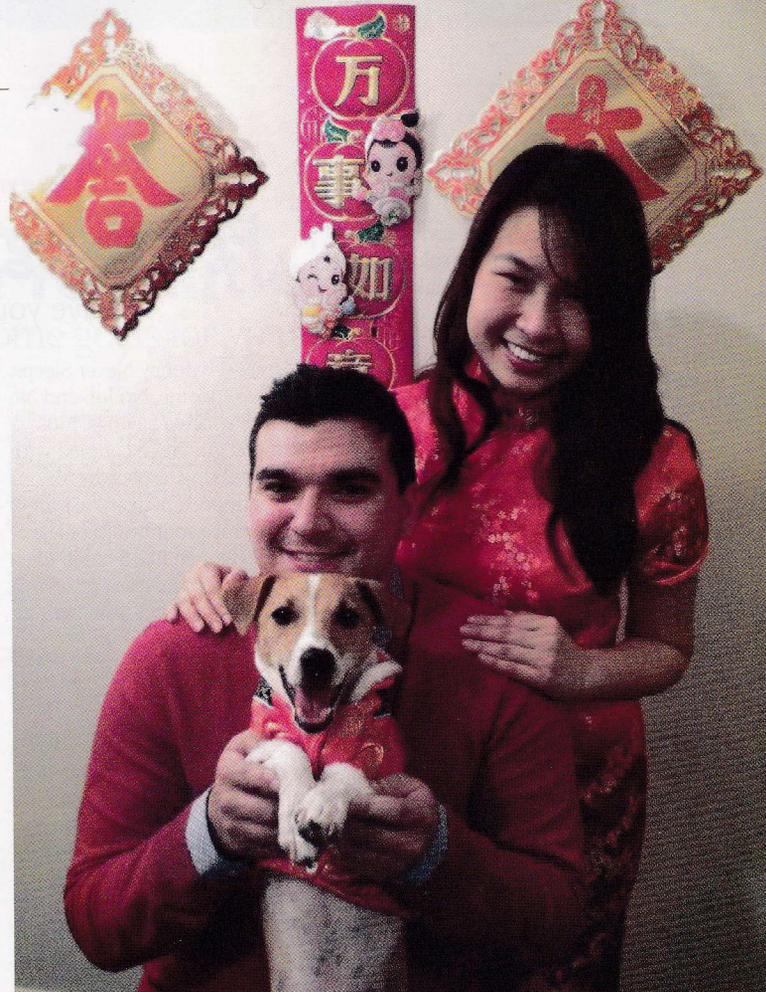
By Lisa Evans

Jessica Lee will crack open the champagne and watch the clock approach midnight on Dec. 31 with her Canadian friends, but, for her, the real party won't happen until the end of the month when she celebrates Chinese New Year. This year, Chinese New Year falls on Jan. 31 (the date changes each year with the lunar calendar).

## Chinese celebrations

While Lee is the only one of her family to reside in Canada, she tries to keep her heritage alive by following the traditions of her home country. "I celebrate Chinese New Year with friends by having a get-together to eat," says Lee. Food plays an important role in the celebration. Whole fish, symbolizing togetherness and abundance, noodles, symbolizing a long life, tangerines or oranges, symbolizing wealth and luck, and *Nian Gao* (a sweet steamed cake), symbolizing achieving new heights in the upcoming year, fill Lee's dining table.

Her house is decorated in red — a colour symbolizing good fortune and joy. In China, cherry blossoms are sometimes used to decorate houses while red lanterns are typically hung outside doors. Cleaning the house before the celebration is also an annual ritual, symbolizing a fresh start to the New Year. "You're not allowed to clean the house on the first or second day of Chinese New Year," says Lee, as cleaning immediately after the celebration would sweep away all the good luck and fortune that was brought into the home on New Year's Day.



Jessica Lee with her boyfriend, Josh Corbett, and their dog, Sherlock, who also dresses up for Chinese New Year.



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Many will get new haircuts or buy new clothes to be worn on the first day of the Chinese calendar year. "You want everything to be new and clean for the first day as a foundation for a good year ahead," says Lee. Lee often shows up to work wearing red or a brand new clothing item on the first day of the New Year, in keeping with the Chinese tradition.

In China, some families have a lion dance and fireworks in front of their house. "The loud noise is meant to scare away evil spirits and the dance is meant to bring good fortune and happiness to the household," says Lee. Children receive red packets filled with money from relatives to symbolize luck and prosperity. Lee hopes to pass on the tradition to her own children someday.

**South American spin**

Elvira Sanchez de Malicki follows Ecuadorian tradition when ringing in the New Year in her Toronto household. In Ecuador, families make a life-sized dummy called the *año viejo* (old year). Clothes are stuffed with newspaper, wood and firecrackers, and topped off with a paper mache mask of an old man's face. Men dress up as women to represent the "widow" of the *año viejo* — the year that has passed — and read the will of the old man, which contains the wishes for the coming year.

At midnight, families gather outside their homes to burn the *año viejos*. "Burning the old year means you're getting rid of all the bad things that happened in the previous year so you're able to start with a clean slate," says Sanchez de Malicki, who has kept the tradition of burning the old year in her Canadian household. She also invites guests to write down all the bad things that happened during the year and those are burned with the dummy. Guests also write wishes for the New Year, which Sanchez de Malicki places in an urn with perfume, which is used to make offerings during the year.

**Other world traditions**

Russia celebrates two New Years: one following the Gregorian calendar and the other following the Julian calendar. Jan. 1 is called the New New Year and is a public celebration with fireworks displays and street parties. The Old New Year, celebrated on Jan. 14, is spent privately with family.

In Japan, people hang a rope made of straw in front of their homes to keep out evil spirits. Paper lobsters are used as decorations in many Japanese homes as the curved back of the lobster resembles an elderly person, symbolizing the wish for longevity.

In Spain, Portugal and many countries in Latin America, 12 grapes, symbolizing the 12 months of the year, are eaten at midnight. With each grape, you're invited to make a wish for that month. 🌟



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