

This Day in History... January 22, 2023

The Year of the Rabbit

This year, January 22, 2023, marks the start of the Year of the Rabbit on the Chinese calendar. The New Year celebration – also known as the Spring Festival – is the most important holiday in Chinese culture.

Though modern China uses the Gregorian calendar, the traditional Chinese calendar is lunar based, following the movement of the Moon rather than the Earth's revolution around the Sun. This calendar typically consists of 12 months with 29-30 days each, totaling 353-355 days. Every two or three years, a leap, or intercalary, month is added to keep the calendar in sync with the solar calendar, resulting in a year of 383-385 days. According to the Chinese calendar, years are grouped in cycles of 12, and 12 animal symbols – said to represent the characteristics of that year – are assigned accordingly.



Xin nian kuai le' means Happy New Year in Chinese

The Chinese New Year occurs on the day of the second new moon after the winter solstice. This happens between January 21 and February 19 on our calendar. The Year of the Rabbit begins on January 22, 2023. The Year of the Rabbit is forecasted to bring a soothing change from the chaos often encountered in the preceding Year of the Tiger (a sign that can be impulsive and rebellious).

In the Chinese zodiac, the rabbit (also known as the hare) is the fourth animal in the 12-year Lunar New Year cycle. In the Chinese legend about the zodiac animals, the rabbit was the fastest of all, but boastful and arrogant. He even made fun of how slow his neighbor, the ox, was. One day, the Jade Emperor sent out invitations to a party to determine the order of animals in the zodiac. The rabbit was sure he would arrive before all the other animals and claim the first spot. He was in the lead, however, since no one else was around, he decided to take a nap. By the time he woke up, the rat, ox, and tiger had all arrived ahead of him. It is a lesson similar to the one taught by the Western fable of "The Tortoise and the Hare," – too much pride can be your downfall.

People born in the Year of the Rabbit are said to be graceful, thoughtful, compassionate, sensitive, and calm, but sometimes can appear aloof or passive. They're often hardworking, ambitious, kind, charismatic, and have high attention to detail. They are often friendly, outgoing, like the company of others, and avoid conflict. It is also said those born in the year of the rabbit tend to be more artistic and creative, finding jobs in art, music, architecture, and literature. They're also known to be very stylish and interested in different cultures. Skilled communicators, hares excel in management positions. They also make excellent teachers and public relations people, therapists, psychiatrists, doctors, writers, masseurs, publishers, designers, actors, and musicians. It's fun to discover the hidden meanings behind the animals of the Chinese zodiac!

Recent years of the rabbit include: 1903, 1915, 1927, 1939, 1951, 1963, 1975, 1987, 1999, and 2011. Some famous rabbits you may know are Albert Einstein, Leon Trotsky, Frank Sinatra, Pope Benedict XVI, Walt Whitman, and Marie Curie. People born in the year of the hare likely find their best matches with people born in the year of the sheep, pig, or dog.



2023 Year of the Rabbit stamp picturing traditional papercut mask.

In Chinese culture, the hare is a symbol of the Moon, while the Peacock symbolizes the Sun. Combined, the two symbols make up the Yin and Yang of life. Some legends say the markings on the moon show the hare pounding a mortar and pestle. They believed it was the companion of the moon goddess Chang'e, and that it was always pounding the elixir of life.

In preparation for New Year celebrations, homes are given a thorough cleaning to sweep away any bad luck that may have been experienced in the departing year. As signs of prosperity and good fortune, special flowers and decorations are displayed. For example, peach blossoms are hung in hopes of bringing a long life, and the kumquat fruit represents good luck.

Kumquats resemble miniature oranges. The rind is sweet, and a delightful complement to the bitter pulp. Candied kumquats are a popular New Year treat. Kumquats are symbols of the Lunar New Year for reasons beyond their taste. In Chinese society, words often have symbolism not only for what they mean, but what they sound like, or can be connected to. The word "kumquat" is based on the Cantonese words kam (gold) and kwat (orange). Gold refers to good fortune and orange suggests vitality. Kumquats are given in pairs as gifts during the New Year, since two is a very lucky Chinese number.



The first Chinese New Year stamp issued by the US to commemorate the Year of the Rabbit.



This stamp pictures a pair of kumquats, a popular fruit often given in pairs as gifts.

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