



Ready to usher in Chinese New Year, the Year of the Rooster, *Kate Farr* introduces some exciting ways to enjoy the celebration with kids

Winter in Hong Kong is all about celebration, and hot on the heels of Christmas comes Chinese New Year (CNY). Here's a look at this most family-friendly of festivals, and a few top tips for getting the best out of Hong Kong's biggest party.

The basics

First up, a few facts. Based on the lunar rather than the Gregorian

calendar, CNY begins on the first day of the new moon, which falls any time between January 21 and February 20 each year. Also known as Spring Festival, this celebration dates back thousands of years and is a major three-day holiday here in Hong Kong. This year, January 28 is the first day of the Lunar New Year.

2017 ushers in the Year of the Rooster, one of 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac, the others being the Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit,

Dragon, Snake, Horse, Goat, Monkey, Dog and Pig. Babies born throughout each year are thought to display certain characteristics unique to their zodiac animal, for example Tigers are thought to be great leaders, Goats are creative, while 2017's flock of Roosters are said to be practical and honest.

An ancient folk story explains how these creatures made the final cut to be immortalised in the zodiac – the Jade Emperor called a race,

decreeing that the first 12 animals to swim across a fast-flowing river would each have a year named in their honour. Thirteen animals lined up on the riverbank; however, the poor cat was pushed into the water by the rat, and was excluded from the final line-up.

TOP TIP Kids can discover more about CNY in a fun and humorous way by picking up Hong Kong author Sarah Brennan's Chinese zodiac series of children's books. With a new animal tale released annually just in time for CNY – this year we say hello to Rickshaw Rooster – this fast-paced and funny series is the perfect CNY primer. *The Tale of Pinyin Panda* is a hilarious take on The Great Race and explains exactly why the Panda never made the Chinese zodiac!

Flower power

CNY festivities are always marked with floral decoration, with a variety of auspicious plants on sale to usher in prosperity for the new lunar year. Miniature kumquat trees are a popular home decoration – the fruit's orange/ golden colour is a symbol of money, while pomelos, often seen in pairs, are said to signify family unity. You'll also see orchids galore – these delicate blooms are symbolic of both fertility and luxury, so are always popular during the Spring Festival.

Pick up your plants at one of the festive flower markets, the largest (and busiest) of which are located within Causeway Bay's Victoria Park, and Prince Edward's Fa Hui Park, although there are smaller fairs dotted all over the city.

TOP TIP If you don't fancy braving the crowds, the football stadium on Tung Chung Road usually hosts a small Chinese New Year flower market, while Prince Edward's permanent stalls on Flower Market Road often yield better bargains than the seasonal flower fairs.



DB kids enjoying the CNY celebrations in 2016

Enjoy the parade

While Discovery Recreation Club and Club Siena both hold vibrant celebrations, the annual International Chinese New Year Night Parade is Hong Kong's main event. You can expect dancers and floats from across the globe, not to mention what feels like the city's entire population, congregating along the streets of Tsim Sha Tsui. This colourful carnival takes place on the evening of January 28, beginning at the Hong Kong Cultural Centre, before snaking its way along Canton, Haiphong and Nathan roads to its finishing point at the Sheraton Hotel.

TOP TIP There's no real way of avoiding the crowds, which can number over 150,000 people, but purchasing tickets to one of the viewing stands allows for entry from 7pm and at least guarantees you a seat. Check www.discoverhongkong.com for ticketing details. Failing that, find your spot at street level on Canton Road (just outside the Chanel store) for a good view, coupled with easy access to Ocean Terminal's many public toilets and food outlets.

Wish upon a tree

Another popular Spring Festival ritual, and one that kids will love, is an excursion to Lam Tsuen and its famous Wishing Tree. This Tai Po village is home to two ancient trees that were traditionally visited during festival times, when people would throw joss paper into the branches and make their wishes for the upcoming year. It was thought that the higher the branch your paper landed on, the more likely it was that your wish would materialise. These days, the papers are attached to nearby racks in order to protect the trees, but the wishes remain just as strong!

TOP TIP Still an extremely popular spot to visit over CNY, Lam Tsuen also plays temporary host to many of the night parade's floats, so if the main event is a little too crowded for you, head here for a flavour of the evening. Be sure to visit www.discoverhongkong.com for 2017's event dates and times.

Whatever you decide to do this CNY, Kung Hei Fat Choi! And here's wishing you a very happy Year of the Rooster! **B**

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