

Illuminating the New Year



The Chinese Lantern Festival, also known as Yuan Xiao Jie, will be celebrated on February 12, 2025, marking the end of the Lunar New Year festivities. With a history that spans over

2,000 years, this festival has its origins in the Han Dynasty (206 BC–AD 220), when emperor Han Mingdi promoted the lighting of lanterns to honor Buddha. Over time, the tradition evolved into a broader celebration of family, community, and hope for the future.

At the heart of the festival are the colorful lantern displays, which light up streets, parks, and homes. In ancient times, these lanterns were simple paper creations illuminated by candles, but today's festivals feature intricate designs, often shaped like animals or iconic symbols. Lanterns are believed to symbolize letting go of the past and embracing good fortune for the coming year. A unique aspect of the festival is the tradition of solving riddles attached to the lanterns. Dating back to the Song Dynasty (960–1279), these riddles provide a fun, intellectual challenge for festival-goers, with puzzles that range from playful to deeply philosophical.

Tangyuan, sweet glutinous rice dumplings, are a key part of the festival's culinary traditions. Their round shape represents family unity and harmony, and they're often filled with sweet sesame paste, peanuts, or red beans. The festivities also include lively performances, such as lion and dragon dances, along with dazzling fireworks displays that heighten the joyful atmosphere. Historically, the festival was one of the few occasions when young women could venture out in public, adding a romantic element for couples strolling beneath the lantern-lit sky.

The Lantern Festival remains a cherished cultural event in China, blending ancient traditions with modern celebrations and offering a moment to reflect on the past while welcoming the future with hope and light.

February Birthdays

If you were born between February 1–18, you are Aquarius, the Water Bearer. Witty, clever, and honest, Water Bearers desire independence above all and are not afraid to deviate from the crowd to pursue their own interests. Those born between February 19–28 are Pisces, the Fish. Selfless, spiritual, and intuitive, Pisces swim on an inner journey. They are emotional, compassionate people who are always willing to help others.

Langston Hughes (poet) – February 1, 1902
Ina Garten (cook) – February 2, 1948
James Dean (actor) – February 8, 1931
Jimmy Durante (actor) – February 10, 1893
Toni Morrison (author) – February 18, 1931
Sidney Poitier (actor) – February 20, 1927
Steve Jobs (innovator) – February 24, 1955
Jackie Gleason (actor) – February 26, 1916
Elizabeth Taylor (actress) – February 27, 1932

A Nose for Lies



On February 23, 1940, Walt Disney released *Pinocchio*. In honor of the wooden boy who could not tell a lie without his nose growing, enjoy the quiz below. Do you know which statements are true and which are false?

1. Pinocchio was created by Geppetto.
2. Jiminy Cricket serves as Pinocchio's conscience.
3. The Red Fairy helps Pinocchio learn right from wrong.
4. Moby is the name of the whale in the film.
5. Pinocchio is turned into a real boy at the end of the movie.

ANSWERS: 1. True: Geppetto is the kindhearted woodcarver who creates Pinocchio. 2. True: Jiminy Cricket guides Pinocchio as his conscience throughout the story. 3. False: The Blue Fairy plays a significant role in teaching Pinocchio important life lessons. 4. False: Moby is the giant whale that Pinocchio and Geppetto encounter. 5. True: Pinocchio becomes a real boy after proving his bravery and honesty.

February 2025

Commons Happenings

MEMORY CARE



Celebrating February

Canned Food Month

Time Management Month

Black History Month

Pancake Week
February 17–23

Groundhog Day
February 2

Thank a Mail Carrier Day
February 4

Bagel and Lox Day
February 9

Galentine's Day
February 13

Valentine's Day
February 14

International Sword Swallower's Day
February 22

Single-Tasking Day
February 22

World Spay Day
February 25

Goody Goody Gumdrops!

February is a sweet month for candy lovers, with both Bubble Gum Day and Gumdrops Day celebrated within weeks of each other. Bubble Gum Day falls on the first Friday of February, while Gumdrops Day is February 15. Both holidays highlight the history and fun behind these popular treats.

Bubble gum has a surprisingly long history, dating back to ancient peoples who chewed natural substances like tree resin. Modern bubble gum, however, was invented in 1928 by Walter Diemer, a young accountant at the Fleece Corporation. Diemer accidentally created a formula for gum that wasn't too sticky and could stretch—perfect for blowing bubbles. It was famously pink because that was the only dye available at the time. Bubble gum became an instant hit, and today, Americans chew an average of 100 pieces each year.

Gumdrops, on the other hand, have been around since at least the 19th century. These chewy, colorful candies are often used to decorate cakes and gingerbread houses. While their exact origin is debated, the gumdrop's sugary coating and fruity flavors have made them a long-standing favorite. The candy was so beloved that a NASA spacecraft was even named *Gumdrop* in the 1960s.

Both gum and gumdrops have made their mark in popular culture and candy aisles for decades. Bubble gum is often linked with childhood, and gumdrops remain part of festive traditions. Furthermore, gumdrops paved the way for other popular gummy candies like gummy bears and gummy worms. Interestingly, while we celebrate these sugary delights, February is also Gum Disease Awareness Month, a reminder to enjoy sweets in moderation and prioritize dental care.

These candy-themed holidays offer a chance to indulge, reminisce, and enjoy the playful nature of bubble gum and gumdrops. Whether you prefer blowing bubbles or savoring a sugary gumdrop, February is full of reasons to celebrate these nostalgic treats.

Purely Refreshing



Judges in Berkeley Springs, West Virginia, treat water like wine from February 20 to 22. Local connoisseurs will examine waters from around the world and declare the world's best water based on taste, aroma, appearance, mouth feel, and aftertaste. Not all water is created equal, so it is divided into categories: municipal (tap), bottled, purified, and carbonated. A separate category for package design is voted on as a People's Choice award.

Berkeley Springs has always attracted those interested in water. George Washington owned land in Berkeley Springs and visited often, perhaps lured there by the warm mineral springs believed to have medicinal qualities. Visitors can still marvel at his bathtub, a stone-lined basin dug into the earth that draws water directly from the mineral springs.

Saturday night brings high anxiety at the Country Inn of Berkeley Springs, where judges sip and sample before a crowd of spectators and water purveyors. Last year drew stiff competition in all water categories. More than 100 different waters sourced from 14 countries representing all six inhabited continents entered the competition.

The best tap water in the world was awarded to Independence, Missouri, a new contender in the category. Castle Rock Water of Dunsmuir, California, once again triumphed, beating entries from Italy and Australia to claim the title of the world's best bottled water. The top sparkling water was awarded to Smeraldina Natural Artesian Water from Sardinia, Italy, with strong runners-up from Bosnia and New Zealand. As for the best purified water, that honor stayed local, with H2Only Purified Water from Berkeley Springs clinching the win.

Hometown favoritism? Unlikely. The waters of Berkeley Springs have attracted international acclaim for more than 250 years.

Stick to Tradition

Eating with two little sticks may seem like a taxing and complicated food delivery method, especially with forks, spoons, and knives available. Yet more than a billion people (a quarter of the human population) use chopsticks every day. This makes February 6, Chopsticks Day, a very big deal.

The old Chinese word for chopsticks is *kuaizi*, which means "quick little bamboo fellows." However, not all chopsticks are made of bamboo. The material, shape, and length of chopsticks varies from place to place. They may be made of wood, plastic, metal, jade, porcelain, ivory, or even bone. Chinese chopsticks are slowly tapered with blunt ends, while Japanese versions are often shorter and more pointed. Also, not all chopsticks are used for eating. In Japan, long *ryoribashi* and *saibashi* (12 to 16 inches) are used for cooking and dishing food, while shorter *hashi* are used for eating.

Chopstick users must also remember proper chopstick etiquette. It is impolite to spear food, and resting chopsticks should never point at another person at the table. But it is never impolite to ask for a spoon if necessary.

The Many Faces of Valentine



While February 14 is widely celebrated as Valentine's Day, there is some confusion as to which Saint Valentine this day refers to. According to the Roman Catholic Church, 14 different saints are named Valentine. Some believe Valentine honors the bishop of Terni, in central Italy, who was condemned by Roman Emperor Claudius. Others believe Valentine was a Roman priest who secretly married Christian couples until he was discovered by the Roman authorities and sentenced to death. Perhaps the real identity of Saint Valentine is unnecessary since what is truly important is his enduring legacy of love.

Curtains Up on Opera

With an explosion of media outlets available on the internet, some think the days of opera as an art form are numbered. Operas have been entertaining audiences for 400 years, so why not give one a chance on Opera Day, February 8?



In its heyday, opera was the most exciting and dramatic form of entertainment imaginable. The greatest composers, musicians, and singers performed in elaborate music halls. No expense was spared on the grand sets and fine costumes. The perfect marriage of music and

theater, opera was a thrill, even in America. During the 1920s, throngs of young fans would stop traffic in New York City just to catch a glimpse of their favorite soprano. The kids screamed, threw flowers and ribbons, waved American flags, and acted in a manner typically associated with fans of the Beatles. Yes, 100 years ago, opera was like rock 'n' roll.

So which opera should one see, or hear, to feel this exuberance of yesteryear? Many believe that the greatest opera is Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, a masterpiece that is serious, frightening, and funny all at the same time. Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* and Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* are two parts of the same story. Rossini's opera, a prequel to Mozart's, gives more detail to the life of the wily comedic hero Figaro. Verdi's *La Traviata*, one of the most performed operas in the world today, has come a long way from when it was first condemned as scandalous in 1853. Then there is always Bugs Bunny's *What's Opera, Doc?* Elmer Fudd is hunting wabbits again, but this time he is in full Viking gear in a parody of Wagner's *The Ring of the Nibelungen*.

If the human voice is indeed "God's most beautiful instrument," then there may be no better way to enjoy it than listening to the opera.

Cookie Cravings

It's the weekend you've been waiting for all year: February 24–25 is Girl Scout Cookie Weekend! The iconic flavors are all back: Thin Mints, Samoas, Trefoils, Tagalongs, Do-si-dos, and Lemon-Ups. Two other popular options this season are Adventurefuls, a brownie-inspired cookie with caramel-flavored crème, and a gluten-free option, Toffee-tastic, a buttery cookie packed with toffee bits.

This year, the price of Girl Scout Cookies has increased slightly to six dollars a box, which reflects rising costs. Every dollar goes toward supporting programs that help build our next generation of female leaders. The Girl Scout Cookie program continues to teach Girl Scouts five key life skills: goal-setting, decision-making, money management, people skills, and business ethics. Plus, scouts grow in courage, confidence, and character. There's something extra sweet about enjoying these cookies while knowing you're supporting such an impactful program.

Crossing the Clouds



Perhaps one of the greatest sightseeing adventures in the world is a four-hour train ride on the Bernina Express from Switzerland to Italy through the Alps.

There may be no better time to travel the route than in February, when the land is glistening white with snow.

What makes the journey so special? The railway, which opened in 1904, crosses 196 bridges, passes through 55 tunnels, and climbs more than 7,000 feet (2,100 meters). This marvel of engineering was designed to open isolated mountain villages to the rest of the world. For these reasons, the rail line has been granted status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.