



Every year a spectacle of dancing dragons and lions, colour, music and fabulous food welcomes Chinese New Year in Chinatowns across the UK and this year will be no exception. London has the biggest and best known Chinatown in the country, and the biggest New Year celebrations outside of Asia, but other Chinatowns in the UK also welcome the New Year in style with firecrackers and fun. This year it's the Year of the Dog and it starts February 16th. Wherever you are in the country you can join the vivid celebrations that are an integral part of the fabric of each city's Chinatown.

Did you know the first Chinese community in Europe was established in Liverpool? At the turn of the 19th century the first wave of Chinese immigrants came ashore on the merchant ships that took advantage of the opening of trade between China and the UK. By the late 1800s, the hundreds of Chinese sailors who congregated near the docks in boarding houses had established the first Chinatown on Pitt Street. These first settlers opened laundrettes and eventually grocery shops and restaurants. It was a self-contained boomtown of approximately 15,000 people until the 1930s

when the Depression hit and the whole area was bombed and flattened during World War II. Further inland Nelson Street took over as the heart of the Chinese community and Chinatown was re-established in the buildings and streets around the offices of the old Blue Funnel Shipping Company. Today those offices are the New Capital restaurant. A blue plaque on the wall outside commemorates the Chinese community's service to the country and to the largest and probably most powerful shipping company in the world of the time.

Chinese New Year celebrations in Liverpool kick off in Great George Square with street performances, art installations, family workshops, Tai Chi demonstrations, concerts and of course parades. The streets throng with families and revellers in costumes celebrating under red paper lanterns strung from building to building. Last year, during the three-day festivities, the arch at the entrance was lit up with a beautiful lumiere show of Chinese mythology.

About those arches: they're the one thing that each Chinatown has in common. The ceremonial arch, or paifang

marks its physical space, the border between the host society and the Chinese community. Paifangs serve to welcome visitors and usually become focal points or at least feature in countless holiday pictures and selfies. There is usually one main, 'official' archway and sometimes other lesser ones with inscriptions linking the host and the Chinese community, which is why they are sometimes called 'Friendship Arches.' Paifangs are usually built by the local Chinese community, Chinatown association, government or local authority. Liverpool's arch was imported in pieces from Shanghai in 2000 and reconstructed by Chinese craftsmen. Standing at 15m high and decorated with 200 dragons on a wooden and marble structure with red, gold, green and the Chinese royal colour of yellow, it is the tallest arch in Europe.

Liverpool might have the tallest arch but Manchester has Europe's oldest, built in 1987 on the corner of Faulkner Street and Nicholas Street. The red and gold arch covered with dragons, phoenixes and symbols of luck and prosperity stands in great contrast to the surrounding Victorian architecture. A short stroll from Piccadilly train station, Manchester's Chinatown is the newest, dating from the



MANCHESTER'S CHINATOWN IS THE NEWEST, DATING FROM THE 1970S.



Old Chinatown



Chinese immigrants

1970s. As the fortunes of Liverpool's docks changed, many newly arrive immigrants from Hong Kong headed east to establish a Chinatown with a Mancunian accent. The first restaurant, Ping Hong, opened its doors in 1948 but it was more than 20 years later that the area was designated as a Chinatown.

The main event of New Year celebrations in Manchester is, of course, the dragon parade which takes over the city centre when it heads off from Albert Square. Spectators line the route to see the 175ft-long lucky dragon ring in a new year of hope and prosperity, while also enjoying street markets, music, acrobatics and lion dances. A major focal point in last year's celebrations was the Lanterns of the Terracotta Warriors, a travelling art installation of 40 brightly coloured and lit up replicas of the famous clay statues that guard the tomb of the first emperor of China in Exchange Square. This year no doubt will bring something equally spectacular.

For sheer size though, London's Chinatown and New Year's celebrations

beat them all. The hugely popular area between Shaftesbury Avenue, Charing Cross Road and Leicester Square hasn't always been the home of London's Chinese community. As in Liverpool, London's Chinese community originally sprang up around the docks, in this case Limehouse in the east, when dockworkers settled in the area, sometimes for a few weeks or months, sometimes longer, and set up businesses catering to the Chinese population. A combination of the decline in shipping, slum clearance after World War I and the destruction of the East End in WWII saw this area dwindle in the mid 20th century and by the 1950s Chinatown had moved to the West End. The area it is in today has long been a home to immigrant communities including French Huguenots and Maltese emigres and eventually the tens of thousands of immigrants from Hong Kong. By the 1960s it was well and truly a Chinatown mainly thanks to the efforts of Chi Cheung Lee. He founded the London Chinatown Chinese Association and worked with local government to build it up into a



Limehouse



London Old Chinatown

WEARING SOMETHING RED WILL BRING GOOD LUCK AND PROSPERITY FOR THE COMING YEAR.

proper neighbourhood with paifangs and dragons climbing walls, pagodas and street signs in Chinese to mark the area and pedestrianised its heart, Gerrard Street. There was even an official grand opening on Oct 29, 1985 with the Duke of Gloucester, the Chinese ambassador and Hong Kong officials. And the arch? Not to be beaten in the paifang stakes, London's Chinatown has not just the biggest but the most and the newest arches in the country. The newest, completed in 2016, is at the corner of Wardour Street and Lisle Street, joining three other gates marking the expansion of the community.

As you would expect from the capital, Chinese New Year celebrations in London are on a different scale to others around the country. Every year hundreds of thousands of people descend on the West End to take part in the parade, lion and dragon dances and other cultural performances in Trafalgar Square, to dine out in Chinatown and to watch the traditional New Year's Eve fireworks. Chinese New Year starts on the last day of the month in the Chinese lunar calendar and ends on the 15th day of the first month with the



Lantern Festival. Families gather for a reunion dinner and to clean their houses, especially the kitchen, to ward off any bad luck from the current year and to make room for good luck before the start of the New Year. One tradition is to make sticky toffee for the kitchen god, a New Year cake made from rice flour, sugar and coconut cream. It's steamed and then cut up. Because it's sticky, when the kitchen god eats it, he can't report on your transgressions. Doors and windows are festooned with red paper decorations to bring in good fortune, happiness, wealth and longevity. Buy something red for you or your house – it's the colour of New

Year and wearing something red will bring good luck and prosperity for the coming year. Children often receive red packets with money for good luck. Families visit parent's homes to wish Happy New Year and in the diaspora that tradition is still observed. Eat Cantonese-style for New Year's by ordering a whole chicken for the family. It's meant to bring happiness for the entire family. Northern Chinese New Year's style means dumplings. Most importantly, if possible, avoid work on Chinese New Year!

XIN NIAN KUAI LE!

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