



## Feeling the Luck at Richmond's Chinese New Year

By Travel Writers

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By Athena Lucero

My multiday celebration of Chinese New Year in Richmond, British Columbia, Canada, was complete with firecrackers, traditional lion and dragon dances, and days of consuming "lucky" food to usher in good fortune and to feed the spiritual world. Chinese New Year is marked by the lunar-solar calendar and falls on a different day each year. In 2017, the Year of the Rooster, it was Jan. 29. In 2018, the Year of the Dog lands on Feb. 16.

The Chinese zodiac has 12 signs, each representing an animal: rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, goat, monkey, rooster, dog and pig, with the year of your birth determining your sign. The zodiac is based on a 12-year cycle, so when the rooster relinquishes its year in the limelight, it will not reappear until 2029.

The holiday (also celebrated by other Asian countries) is a family affair that remembers beloved ancestors, and the atmosphere in Richmond, located south of Vancouver, was extraordinary. More than 60 percent of the island city's population of 198,000 is Asian, and 50 percent of that is Chinese. It's no surprise, then, that its celebration is the largest in Canada. And Richmond is famous for having the most authentic Chinese cuisine in North America (more than 400 restaurants).

To my surprise, a shopping mall was the main venue. Named after the Aberdeen area in Hong Kong, Aberdeen Center is an impressive three-story "East meets West" indoor shopping haven in the Golden Village. Its curving facade and colorful architecture makes it a work of art.

With over 100 stores, Aberdeen Center is all things Asian with a Las Vegas-style musical fountain, and overlooking the water show is an 800-seat food court offering international dishes.

"Being in Richmond," a local told me, "is like being in China without flying there."

Festival-goers claimed their viewing spots hours in advance to see performances and the much-anticipated lion and dragon dances. We also watched "Pick the Green," where the red dragon slithered from store to store and floor to floor gobbling lucky lettuce dangling from merchants' doorways.

Special dishes — lucky because of their shape or the sound of their pronunciation — are prepared especially for the holiday: long noodles (long life), spring rolls for prosperity (its shape looks like gold bars), dumplings (wealth), fish served whole (for completeness) and eaten towards the end of the meal (its Chinese pronunciation sounds like abundance), lettuce (good fortune) and round sweet sticky rice (for family togetherness).

The flavors of the city were glorious: Golden Sichuan (or Szechuan) where cooking with chilies reigns supreme; dim sum at Fisherman's Terrace, where its dumplings are said to be the best in town and its dessert consists of sesame balls made with green melon and a sweet black sesame center; and Silkway Halal, where we savored fabulous Sichuan cuisine.

Days of nonstop activities culminated with a Chinese New Year Eve dinner in the modest dining room of Golden Paramount. With curtains drawn at the Hong Kong-style restaurant, the ambience contrasted with more opulent dinner venues around the city.

"It's not a showy place," said local food writer Lee Man, who was born in Hong Kong and raised in Vancouver. "In Hong Kong, people like quiet and serene."

Man pointed out that dishes are delivered one at a time, "Hong Kong-style serving," he called it, "so that guests can enjoy each one individually."

The evening was equal parts spiritual reverence, family reunion and food fest. A cornucopia of dishes graced the table, including stir-fried Typhoon Shelter Crab made with garlic, scallions, bean sauce and chilies and Eight Treasure Duck stuffed with mushrooms, chestnuts, sticky rice, sausage, barley, lotus seeds and salted duck egg yolk.

Not far from the Golden Village was Wild Sweets confectionery "atelier," where a whimsical life-size rooster made from chocolate sat in the window. Surrounding it were elegant red and gold boxes filled with Year of the Rooster chocolates created by world-acclaimed chocolatiers Dominique and Cindy Duby, whose creations originate with cocoa beans they hand-select.

Chinese New Year includes gift-giving, but only for children in the form of "lucky money" tucked inside red envelopes. In China, red is a lucky color symbolizing happiness, beauty, vitality and good fortune.

Chinese New Year brings with it many superstitions. A clean house before the clock strikes midnight is big. Brooms and dustpans are then put away, and their use on New Year's Day is forbidden to avoid sweeping away good fortune. Clean the slate by paying all debts. And setting off firecrackers shoos away the old year and welcomes in the new one. Always have a good attitude on Chinese New Year and always look your best.

I will be ready for Year of the Dog: red everywhere, a clean house and on Chinese New Year I'll be all dolled up. But I won't shampoo my hair. That will wash away good luck.

WHEN YOU GO:

To learn more about Richmond and the 2018 Chinese New Year program of events, visit [www.visitrichmondbc.com](http://www.visitrichmondbc.com).

Chinese New Year activities include the Flower and Gift Fair, Countdown Night, Pre-Countdown Stage Show, drumming, craft-making, meditation, personal blessings from the Chinese God of Fortune and much more.

My accommodation was the Marriot Vancouver Airport Hotel, 877-323-8888 or [www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/yvrva-vancouver-airport-marriott-hotel](http://www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/yvrva-vancouver-airport-marriott-hotel).



A crowd gathers at Aberdeen Center in Richmond, British Columbia, Canada, for a Chinese New Year performance. Photo courtesy of Athena Lucero.



A Chinese New Year tradition is to make offerings at the International Buddhist Temple in Richmond, British Columbia, Canada. Photo courtesy of Athena Lucero.



A dim sum meal at Fisherman's Terrace in Richmond, British Columbia, Canada, ends with sweet sesame balls. Photo courtesy of Athena Lucero.

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