

# Chinese New Year lights up world

Cities across the globe have been embracing large-scale celebrations that were once confined to Chinatowns

By **CECILY LIU** in London,  
**LIA ZHU** in San Francisco,  
**LOW SHI PING** in Singapore  
and **FU JING** in Brussels

**L**unar new year celebrations, exported around the world by Chinese miners, sailors and workers in the 19th century, expanded during the 20th century as Chinese communities developed vibrant Chinatowns in major cities.

Now, as millions of Chinese and non-Chinese alike began to celebrate the Year of the Dog on Feb 16, Chinese New Year has moved from Chinatown to downtown.

It was impossible to move in some parts of Central London on Feb 18 as hundreds of thousands of people watched lion and dragon dances, parades and performances marking the start of the lunar new year.

The London celebrations, which organizers said were the largest outside of Asia, started with a parade featuring 50 Chinese dragon- and lion-dance teams making their way from Trafalgar Square through the West End to Chinatown.

Similar celebrations have become popular globally, with grand events being organized to attract the Chinese community as well as mainstream society.

In London, stage performances began at noon on Feb 18 in Trafalgar Square, with firecrackers heralding the start of the celebrations. Pop-up shops and restaurants surrounded the square, offering visitors authentic and diverse regional Chinese food and the chance to buy traditional souvenirs and colorful decorations.

This year's celebrations had the theme Celebrating the 'Golden Era' for UK-China Relations, referencing a phrase that became popular during Chinese President Xi Jinping's state visit to the United Kingdom in 2015.

Londoner Andy Leung has been involved in the city's Chinese New Year celebrations for several years as a performer and producer, and he has watched the festivities grow.

"When I got involved it was still a community event, run by and purely for the Chinese community," he said. "It wasn't purposely put on to attract tourists."

But it has grown over the years, moving to Trafalgar Square. This year's event was expected to attract 200,000 people.

"We have more major London companies and city officials and offices involved, making it the huge event it is now," Leung said.

Sadiq Khan, the mayor of London, said Chinese New Year is always a joyous time on the city's cultural calendar.

"London is open to all people and all communities. That's why I'm



Chinese and Belgian artists perform at the lantern-hanging ceremony at the Galeries Royales Saint-Hubert in Brussels on the first day of Chinese New Year on Feb 16. Observing the Chinese tradition has become more common around the world. WU NIAN / CHINA DAILY

so proud of the Chinese New Year festivities here in the capital," said Khan.

In Brussels, 200 red lanterns illuminated the Belgian capital as a prelude to the seven-day Chinese Lantern Festival, which began on Feb 22.

The lanterns were set in five places in Brussels, including the Grand Place and Central Station. The lanterns showcase the beauty of Chinese architecture, artifacts and landscapes through traditional craftsmanship.

"The lanterns were all made in China, and we used 12 containers to bring them to Brussels," said Yang Mingxin, the engineering project manager of Zigong Lantern Culture Industry Group of Southwest China's Sichuan province.

Ariana Fonteyne said: "Each year, we come to the center to see the parade and performance. My father has been interested in the Chinese for a very long time. He has introduced Chinese culture to me, my mother and my brother."

The family, which lives in Belgium, has celebrated Chinese New Year for

15 years. "I love the character of the dragon and the strong colors and impressive dances. It's something really different from my own culture. It's magic," she said.

In San Francisco, the New Year was ushered in at California's state buildings, which has been a tradition for 14 years. Chinese Consul General Luo Linqun wished the community an auspicious New Year.

Various festivities are being held in the San Francisco Bay Area throughout February and early March.

The San Francisco Symphony staged its 18th annual Chinese New Year Concert on Feb 24, and a Chinese New Year Celebration was to be held during an NBA game between the Golden State Warriors and Oklahoma City Thunder on Feb 25.

"The celebration of the lunar new year was brought to California by early Chinese immigrants who started to arrive during and shortly after the Gold Rush and has been very important for the Chinese in the US," said Yong Chen, a history professor at the University of California, Irvine.

For many years, the celebrations

remained within the confines of Chinatowns and were considered exotic and foreign, he said.

As the number of Chinese people in the United States increases, more non-Chinese have started to celebrate lunar new year, he said.

"The broadening of the awareness is also due to the shared celebration of other Asians, such as Vietnamese, in the US," he added.

Chinese New Year celebrations are even more deeply ingrained in Singapore and Malaysia, where ethnic Chinese constitute three-fourths and one-fourth of the populations, respectively.

On Jan 27, Singapore Chinatown's official light-up ceremony took place, and its celebrations will last for seven weeks.

Thousands of handcrafted lanterns in the shapes of bamboo, oranges and octagons, with auspicious Chinese words, decorate the area.

Soaking up the New Year spirit was retiree Lim Heng Fong, who visits the Chinatown light-up ceremony each year and also shops for

home decorations.

"It puts me in the mood for the festival," she said. "I also hope some of the positivity from the happy atmosphere rubs off on me during the year."

Along with her husband, Lim visits the nearby River Hongbao — another annual fixture on the Singapore calendar during lunar new year — at Marina Bay.

This year, 35 craftsmen from Sichuan were employed for three months to create more than 500 lanterns for use in 60 displays.

Fireworks shows took place every night at River Hongbao's 11-day event, from Feb 14 to 24.

Public celebrations aside, lunar new year in Singapore has a more personal spin, with families typically gathering under the roof of the patriarch or matriarch to mark the occasion.

Contact the writers at  
cecily.liu@mail.chinadailyuk.com

Bo Leung in London and Wu Nian in Brussels contributed to this story.