

An Indian Birthday



Indians celebrate their birthdays with new clothes, parties and dancing.

Children celebrating their birthdays go to school in brand new clothes and accessories, such as bracelets and necklaces.

On the morning of their birthdays, Indian children first visit a shrine with their parents and are blessed. Then, according to the Caravan, the birthday children enjoy the rare gift of wearing new, coloured clothes to school instead of the typical uniform. They also pass out candy to everyone at the school with the help of a special friend.

At home, the celebrations are even more grand. For children and adults alike, there are big dinner parties with catered and traditional Indian food. Some of the most popular dishes are biryani, which is a spicy fried rice, with gravy, mutton or chicken, curry, chutney and various vegetable dishes. For dessert, dudh pak, or rice pudding, is served with various fruits and nuts. Sometimes these parties include dancing all night. For children, often partygoers pop a balloon filled with confetti so the sparkling bits rain down upon them.

A Chinese Birthday

Chinese age is calculated differently

While for most people around the world, age at birth is calculated at zero, for the Chinese, being born means automatically turning one. Additionally, another year is added to a Chinese person's age on his or her first [Lunar New Year's Day](#). So a Chinese person can be anywhere from one to two years younger, in Western terms, than what their traditional "East Asian age" would dictate. If you have a Chinese friend who says she is 25, for example, she could really be 23 or 24.

But it gets even more complicated. There are three words for "age" in Chinese: one which refers to the traditional system; one called the modern age, which starts at zero but skips the new year's addition; and another called the solid age, which counts a person's age in years from birth.



Birthday cake is popular, but so are noodles

In addition to receiving a cake, many Chinese birthday celebrants also receive a complimentary bowl of longevity noodles. These noodles are made with egg, wheat flour, and soda water, giving them a spongy texture. Tradition has it that the noodles bring long life, but only if you slurp them whole. If you bite off part of the noodle, you risk cutting your own life short.

Birthday dinner? Their treat!

If your Chinese friend is celebrating her birthday at a [restaurant](#), you're in luck. If your friend is traditional, she will be treating you to dinner. Though it may feel weird to accept a present from the person who should be the one receiving the presents, it is completely normal for a Chinese person to pay the bill on her own birthday, no matter how large it may be. So sit back and enjoy the celebrations, but be prepared to reciprocate (return the gift) on your own birthday.

Be careful when giving gifts

Giving a gift to show appreciation for your friend on his birthday is always welcome, but steer clear of certain types of gifts. Never give a watch as a gift, as it reminds the recipient that life is short and death is unavoidable. Chinese people don't like being reminded of their mortality, and giving a watch is basically saying "Congratulations on making it one year closer to death." Other gifts to avoid include green hats, flowers, sharp objects (such as knives), shoes, candles, handkerchiefs, and mirrors. What's a safe alternative that you can never go wrong with? A fruit basket, believe it or not.

Don't delay

If you miss celebrating your friend's birthday before or on the date of her actual birthday, you've missed out for good. It represents bad luck to have a party after the fact. It's also possible that your friend won't want to acknowledge their birthday at all. If she's turning 30, she will just say she remains 29 for an extra year. If she's turning 33, she will buy a piece of meat and chop it into 33 pieces to cast off evil spirits, but will likely skip the party. In fact, birthday celebrations in China are typically reserved for the young and the old. But as China welcomes more and more global influences, it is becoming more common to ditch the superstition and give in to the fun of it all.

An American Birthday

In America people celebrate the birthdays of famous people such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Abraham Lincoln and George Washington.

In some parts of South America and Central America, birthdays are celebrated with a pinata. The Pinata is a paper mache type animal that is filled with candy and small toys and is hung up from a pole or a tree. This is then hit with a stick to break open the pinata to get all the goodies out of it. The children are blindfolded so it makes it harder for them.

Birthdays are celebrated more for the children than for the adults, unless it is a milestone birthday such as 21, 30, 40 or 50.

At the children's parties they have balloons and streamers are hung up and lots of friends are invited to the party. There are always presents, cakes and ice cream. The birthday person has a cake topped with candles; one for each year and they must try to blow them out in one breath. If successful, their secret wish will come true. Sometimes the person having the birthday can choose what they want to do: bowling, swimming, arcades, amusement parks, camping trips and so on.

The majority of American children, celebrate birthdays with a cake topped with lighted candles. Most families use the candles to represent how old a person is turning. When the cake is set before the guest of honour, he or she is supposed to make a wish, without telling anyone what it is. After making a wish, he or she tries to blow out the candles. If all the candles go out with one breath, it is believed that the wish will come true!

Some children receive birthday "spankings", which were originally based on superstition, but are now more of a birthday prank or a joke. Hundreds of years ago, spankings were given for each year of the birthday child's life. Beyond that number, a child received another spanking to grow on, one to live on, one to eat on, one to be happy, and yet another spanking to get married on.

At one time, it was considered back luck if the birthday celebrant was not spanked because it was believed to "soften up the body for the tomb." Historians are unsure if the practice of swatting the birthday girl or boy was treated as a joke, as people view it today.

Singing "Happy Birthday to You" has also been a long-standing tradition on birthdays as well. It was written by two American sisters in 1893 and has been translated into several languages around the world.

In the United States the sweet sixteen party is held for the girls. The symbol for the sweet sixteen party is sugar.