



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

LUNAR NEW YEAR IN THE WORKPLACE

Inclusive Employer Guide

EQUITY · DIVERSITY · INCLUSION

WHAT IS LUNAR NEW YEAR?

The Lunar New Year — also known as Chinese New Year, the Spring Festival, “**Tết**” in Vietnam, “**Seollal**” in Korea, and “**Losar**” in Tibet — marks the first day of the first month of the lunar calendar and is considered one of the most important and widely-celebrated holidays across East Asia.

The Lunar New Year follows the lunisolar calendar and is regulated by the cycles of the moon and sun. In 2023, the Lunar New Year falls on January 22.

Each year of the lunar calendar is associated with one of the twelve animals of the zodiac. The year 2023 is the Year of the Rabbit in the Chinese and Korean zodiacs and is associated with positive characteristics such as mercy, elegance, and beauty. While in Vietnam, 2023 is the Year of the Cat, and is associated with good luck.

WHAT DOES LUNAR NEW YEAR COMMEMORATE?

The Lunar New Year is a time to reflect on the past year and celebrate the coming year with festive activities and celebrations. Each region and community observe their own unique Lunar New Year celebrations, interpretations, and traditions.

In many cultures, it is important to clean and spiritually cleanse the home in preparation for the new year and perform ceremonies that will bring abundance, good luck, and fortune for the year ahead. The holiday is also seen as a time for people to connect with family, friends, and loved ones, and share stories to honour their origins and ancestors.

On the night of the Lunar New Year, many people adorn their homes with colourful lanterns, prepare meals that symbolize abundance and prosperity, take part in traditional dances, exchange money and gifts, and light fireworks. The holiday is also seen as an important opportunity to partake in charitable activities and share with those less fortunate.

In cities across Canada, people of various backgrounds and religions take part in Lunar New Year festivities. As of June 2016, Lunar New Year celebrations have been recognized as an official holiday in Canada, and since 1997, Canada Post has issued stamps featuring the astrological sign of the current year.

HOW CAN WE CREATE AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT?

1 **Get educated.** Ensure staff who supervise or work alongside those who celebrate Lunar New Year are aware of it and how they can be supportive.

2 **Intentional planning and accommodations.** Update your scheduling tools to reflect cultural celebration dates and to support the planning activities. Avoid booking meetings and scheduling events on Lunar New Year if possible.

The University of Toronto recognizes its obligation to prevent discriminatory impacts on members of its community that arise from the failure to accommodate based on religion or creed. It is the responsibility of both the Manager and the individual seeking accommodation to work cooperatively and respectfully to explore and implement appropriate accommodation options. Accommodate requests for time off for cultural observances. If shift work is the norm, staff may want to switch shifts to celebrate Lunar New Year. Look for solutions that suit all parties.

3 **Don't make assumptions.** For personal reasons, not all who celebrate Lunar New Year will do so in the same way. Some may take time off, others may not.