

A New Year IN CHINATOWN

Ring in the Lunar New Year in one of these great cities within a city.



SAN FRANCISCO

When the new Chinese lunar year begins on February 8, a boisterous two-week festival kicks off in Chinatowns across the country—with enormous dragon puppets, fireworks, dancing and tons of food. Here are five great places to celebrate the Year of the Monkey, starting with America's oldest Chinatown, in San Francisco. Once you walk through the iconic Dragon's Gate, you'll have a new understanding of "Gung Hay Fat Choy!" (Happy New Year, that is).

ALANNA HALE



Eastern Bakery



Golden Gate Bakery

Eat

▪ Egg custard tarts called dan tat are a Chinese New Year tradition: The flaky pastry layers suggest abundance in the coming year, and people happily stand in 45-minute lines for a taste of them at **Golden Gate Bakery** (1029 Grant Ave.). A savory mooncake is another popular holiday bite, and **Eastern Bakery** (720 Grant Ave.) stocks 20 flavors.

▪ You'll find rare Chinese ingredients at **China Live** (644 Broadway), a new upscale market with a restaurant on the top floor. It's a hot spot for spicy-foods lovers: You can take home 30 varieties of ground Sichuan peppercorns.

▪ A place that slings Chinese mai tais sounds like a tourist trap, but **Li Po Cocktail Lounge** (916 Grant Ave.) is a legit local favorite; it has been a Chinatown staple since it opened in 1937. The signature mai tai is made with three types of rum and a top-secret Chinese liqueur.

▪ Chefs at **Lucky Creation** (854 Washington St.) follow nearly 2,000-year-old Buddhist cooking techniques. On the first day of the Chinese New Year, the traditional order is lo han jai, a vegetable stew.

▪ Gather your fellow travelers for a dim sum feast at **Great Eastern Restaurant** (649 Jackson St.). Be sure to ask after the seafood specials, like shrimp dumplings and salt-baked octopus.

Li Po Cocktail Lounge



Eastern Bakery



Great Eastern Restaurant

Stay

- To get a great view of the Dragon's Gate, request a room facing Bush Street at **Hotel Triton** (342 Grant Ave.). From \$199; hoteltriton.com
- San Francisco's famous cable cars stop at the entrance to the **Chancellor Hotel** (433 Powell St.), and it's a two-stop ride to Chinatown. Guests get to choose from a dozen special pillows, including a NASA-designed memory-foam cushion and one that hooks up to your MP3 player. From \$129; chancellorhotel.com
- Tony Bennett first sang "I Left My Heart in San Francisco" at the **Fairmont San Francisco** (950 Mason St.) in 1961, and Grammy and Tony nominees still stop by to perform in the Venetian Room. From \$499; fairmont.com

Hotel Triton



The Golden Gate Fortune Cookie Factory



Great China Herb Company

Great China Herb Company



Visit

- San Francisco's **Chinese New Year parade** has been a tradition for more than 150 years. The one on February 20 will feature a 268-foot Golden Dragon (100 people carry it!), costumed lion dancers and more than a half million firecrackers.
- Down the oldest alley in San Francisco, **The Golden Gate Fortune Cookie Factory** (56 Ross Alley) churns out 15,000 cookies a day. Taking a picture of the operation will set you back 50 cents—a courtesy fee for the free warm cookies you're offered upon entering. On your way out, you can buy a bag of freshly folded ones.
- Find your fortune (plus sweeping views of the city) at **Tin How Temple** (1.25 Waverly Pl.). Volunteers practice the ancient art of kau cim fortune-telling, which involves asking a question ("Will I get that promotion?"), shaking a jar of numbered sticks and interpreting a Chinese poem.
- The chrysanthemum flower and goji berries at the century-old Chinese apothecary **Great China Herb Company** (857 Washington St.) will make you look like you got a great night's sleep—even if you didn't.

Check out the Chinatowns in these four other cities.

New York

New York City has the largest Chinese population in the United States, and Chinatown in lower Manhattan always crackles with energy—especially during the Lunar New Year celebration.

EAT

Soup dumplings, or xiao long bao, are a cold-weather staple for Chinatown regulars, and eating them is practically an art form (take a bite, quickly slurp). At **Shanghai Cafe Deluxe** (100 Mott St.), you can watch nimble-fingered chefs fill and fold the dumplings.

VISIT

It's not easy to select a pair of chopsticks at Manhattan's **Yunhong Chopsticks** (50 Mott St.). More than 200 cool sets are for sale, including ones honoring the Year of the Monkey. Buy some as gifts—giving away chopsticks is said to spread happiness.



STAY

Nomo SoHo (9 Crosby St.) is in the heart of the SoHo shopping district, adjacent to Chinatown, and the nod to Chinese culture is subtle but chic. The cocktail lounge downstairs has a feng shui layout, including a triangular notch in the bar to promote the flow of good energy. From \$270; nomosoho.com

Seattle

To see the Chinese influence in Seattle's Chinatown-International District, you just need to look up. You'll notice traditional curved-tiled roofs and fiberglass dragons wrapped around poles. Many of the restaurants in the area are still owned and operated by the same families who have run them for decades.



EAT

The neon signs in the windows of **Mike's Noodle House** (418 Maynard Ave. South) read "congee" and "noodle"—and that's all you need to know when ordering: For breakfast, try the congee (rice porridge) with a side of youtiao (sort of like China's churro); later in the day, try a bowl of super-thin egg noodles and wontons.

VISIT

Martial arts legend Bruce Lee lived in Seattle, and the **Wing Luke Museum** (719 South King St.) offers a docent-led walking tour with stops at his practice dojo and samples of his favorite dishes at a local restaurant.

STAY

Hotel Monaco Seattle (1101 Fourth Ave.) hosts a wine tasting every evening, and the rooms come equipped with yoga mats and—upon request—a pet goldfish. From \$189; monaco-seattle.com

Chicago

Chicago's Chinatown is more than 100 years old—and still growing. In the past decade, the population of Chinese immigrants has increased nearly 25 percent. The neighborhood reflects this mix of old and new with local restaurants that date back decades and with more recent projects, like the restored Pui Tak community center.

EAT

Go 4 Food (212 West 23rd St.) sells the crowd-pleasers (chow fun, mapo tofu), but the spot is best known for fusion dishes like bao tacos. The restaurant is BYOB, so swing by **China Place Liquor City** (2105 South China Pl.) for a bottle of baijiu: The clear liquor, distilled from sorghum, is nicknamed "firewater"—it's about 110 proof.

VISIT

Sign up for a **Chinese New Year Dumpling Dinner** (chicagocci.com) hosted by the Chicago Chinese Cultural Institute and you'll learn about the history of dumplings—then you'll mix, fold and steam your own batch.



STAY

The James (55 East Ontario St.), a short "L" ride from Chinatown, is what happens when a museum and a hotel collide. A steady rotation of pieces from a local gallery is on display in the lobby, and guests with rooms facing the inner courtyard are treated to pictograph projections every evening. From \$199; jameshotels.com

Honolulu

Hawaii has been home to Asian immigrants for more than 150 years, and today Honolulu's Chinatown is the best place to experience the melding of Chinese and Pacific Island cultures.

EAT

Traditional Cantonese cha siu bao (pork buns) are steamed, but in Hawaii you'll find baked versions called manapua (Hawaiian for "delicious pork thing"). Try either classic barbecue pork or more modern takes, like coconut and black sugar, at **Royal Kitchen** (100 North Beretania St.).



VISIT

On the first Friday evening of every month, Chinatown turns into a giant block party. Art galleries keep their doors open until 9 p.m., and bands play on the street. Start at the **Hawai'i State Art Museum** (250 South Hotel St.), where you can see works from local Chinese-American artists, like Hon-Chew Hee's 20-foot steel mural.

STAY

Waikiki Beach is about 20 minutes south of Chinatown, and **The Modern Honolulu** (1775 Ala Moana Blvd.) is a surfer's paradise. It's steps from the beach, and the rooms come stocked with sarongs to use during your stay. From \$309; themodernhonolulu.com