

Good Deeds and Good Fortune



February 17 may ring in China's new year, but preparations often begin weeks ahead of Chinese New Year's Day. One of the most important customs is a thorough cleaning of the house. This ensures any bad luck built up over the past year is swept away. Similarly, one must not clean during the first days of the new year so as not to sweep away

any new good luck. Cleaning house also means it's time to take care of unfinished business; paying debts and resolving quarrels are all part of prepping for the new year.

Food is an important part of any Chinese New Year celebration, but most food must be prepared in advance, thanks to a popular superstition dictating that knives be put away on New Year's. Using a knife might just "cut off" the flow of good luck and prosperity to a home.

Perhaps the most important New Year's tradition is paying respect to ancestors. Celebrations can begin only after proper homage has been paid. On New Year's Eve, temples are often crowded with people bringing food, incense, and other offerings for their departed forebears.

Next door to China in neighboring Tibet, February 18 brings the new year, called *Losar*—Tibet's most important holiday. Drawing from Buddhist tradition, Tibetans believe good comes only to those who do good themselves. For this reason, *Losar* rituals include a focus on "virtuous attitudes," "virtuous actions," and thus, a "virtuous new year." For three to 15 days, depending on the locale, family and friends gather and celebrate by eating good food, telling stories, lighting fireworks, and playing games. Celebrations also involve donning one's finest clothes to visit temples and offer good wishes to the living, the dead, and the spirits of the enlightened. Since it's common to hurl barley flour, known as *tsampa*, as a spiritual offering, it may be a good thing their neighbors have a broom handy.

Guardians of the Arctic

You don't have to live in the Arctic to celebrate International Polar Bear Day on February 27. The polar bear is one of nature's most awesome beasts and is the world's biggest hunter. Polar bears spend much of their time lying in wait outside holes cut in the ice by ringed seals, which must return to the surface for air every five to 15 minutes. A seal's survival depends on maintaining its series of breathing holes. That same survival instinct is what eventually provides the polar bear with its next meal.

As the Arctic warms and ice recedes, polar and brown bear habitats have begun to overlap, and hybrid polar-brown bear offspring have appeared. Dubbed *nanulaks* by Canadian wildlife officials, the hybrid bears are whitish brown with long claws and a humped back. Offspring of a male polar bear and a female grizzly are called *pizzlies*; reverse the parentage and it's a *grolar bear*.

However, as long as there is ice to roam and there are seals to hunt, a polar bear's home will always be the Arctic.

Dancing the Divine



Ballet is not only a beautiful and elegant dance form, but it's also the perfect civilizing art, says ballerina, critic, and historian Jennifer Homans. Throughout its history, ballet has been used to refine the body, mind, and soul. Since its origins as a dance of

wealthy Italians during the Renaissance, ballet grew beyond the dance floors of the rich. To develop its fluid and balanced movements, choreographers used math and geometry, then taught by ballet teachers to their students. The dance was thought to be so harmonious and perfect that it was given religious significance. In their view, mastering ballet could actually improve the soul. With results like that, why not try a few steps on February 7, Ballet Day?

February Aloha

For those dwelling in the northern hemisphere, February brings a chill to both the air and the spirit. Spring is just a month away, but who can think of spring when the snow's still falling? Drive away the chill on February 1 with Hula in the Coola Day.



Hula dancing is an integral part of Hawaii's Polynesian history and culture. The dance is far more than swaying the hips in a grass skirt; it's a ritual way to explain Hawaiian gods and goddesses, the history of the people, and the mysteries of natural phenomena through chanting, singing, and dancing. Hula has been performed during religious rituals, rites of passage, social

gatherings, and even football games. So if you're looking to warm your spirit this February 1 with a little *aloha*, find a real *kumu hula* teacher. Ditch the grass skirt for one made of *kapa*, a traditional fabric handcrafted from the bark of the paper mulberry tree.

Since hula is Hawaii's iconic dance, the ukulele must be Hawaii's iconic instrument. In the 1900s, the ukulele became part of the musical backdrop to hula dances, so it stands to reason that World Ukulele Day falls on February 2, the day after Hula in the Coola. Famed Hawaiian musician Samuel Kamaka explained that the ukulele was first played in the islands in 1879 by João Fernandes, an immigrant from Portugal. His fingers rapidly strummed a four-stringed *braguinha*, which the native Hawaiians nicknamed *ukulele*, a word meaning "jumping fleas."

Perhaps no ukulele musician was as beloved as Israel "IZ" Kamakawiwo'ole. Raised in a musical family from Honolulu (his uncle was Moe Keale), he was exposed to entertainers like Don Ho and Palani Vaughan. His version of "Over the Rainbow" may rival Judy Garland's. It will, no doubt, be strummed the world over on World Ukulele Day.

Employee of the Month: Gabbi



Congrats to Gabbi, our Employee of the Month for February! Our residents describe Gabbi as, "always willing to help no matter how busy she may be." We couldn't agree more! We are lucky to have Gabbi on our team!

Trekkies Rejoice



This year, *Star Trek* celebrates an incredible milestone: 60 years of exploring strange new worlds. Since its first broadcast in 1966, the franchise has captivated audiences of all ages with its stories of courage, friendship, and hope for a better future.

For longtime fans, the anniversary is a chance to reconnect with cherished memories. Special events are planned across the country, including fan conventions, commemorative exhibits, and even themed museum displays showcasing classic costumes and props. Streaming services will highlight favorite episodes and launch new series like *Star Trek: Starfleet Academy*.

The Legacy of the Birkebeiner



Covered in snow, north Wisconsin heats up in February, thanks to “Birkie Fever.” On February 21, around 10,000 skiers from more than 25 countries will participate in the American

Birkebeiner, a cross-country skiing marathon. At 53 kilometers, Wisconsin’s “Birkie” is the largest cross-country skiing race in North America. Of the numerous cross-country ski marathons worldwide, the American Birkie is considered one of the toughest. With temperatures hovering around zero degrees Celsius and an undulating course of hills and valleys, it’s no wonder the race has been dubbed the “Greatest Show on Snow,” where world-class athletes are tested to the limits of their endurance.

The origins of the Birkebeiner races date back to the early 1200s, commemorating an event that inspires much pride among those with Norwegian ancestry. All Birkebeiner races recall a heroic moment in Norway’s history. Historian Sigvart Sorensen told of how, on January 1, 1204, King Haakon III of Norway died suddenly, possibly by poisoning. After the king’s death, a civil war erupted, pitting the wealthy Bagler faction against the Birkebeiners.

A year later, it was decided that the king’s hitherto-unknown heir, an 18-month-old prince, would have to flee. This could be done only with the help of long-distance skiers. Two skiers from the Birkebeiner faction, Torstein Skjevla and Skjervald Skrukka, struck out on a 60-mile journey in the midst of a storm over treacherous mountains to deliver the babe to his mother, Queen Inga, in Trondheim.

The prince, whom we now know as King Haakon IV, would eventually unite Norway, all thanks to two brave Birkebeiners.

February Birthdays

8th Shirley B

20th Jill

The Long Sleep



Karolina Olsson of Sweden became known as the “Sleeping Beauty of Oknö” when, on February 22, 1876, at age 14, she fell into a deep sleep and did not awake for 32 years. How did she survive? Legend has it that family members diligently spoon-fed

her sweetened milk each day. Over the years, they sometimes observed her sleepwalking or crawling. Her family and much of her small remote village believed the girl bewitched. When Olsson finally awoke, she looked in the mirror and burst into tears. She hardly recognized herself. And yet, she seemed to have aged only to her mid-20s, when she should have been 46. Doctors examined her to find no lasting physical or mental damage, only that her mind was still that of a 14-year-old. Olsson had amazingly, inexplicably “hibernated,” though today’s doctors suggest she might have been in a state of catatonia.