

THE MOST IMPRESSIVE CHINESE NEW YEAR CELEBRATIONS IN ITALY TAKES PLACE IN PRATO, TUSCANY

We enter the Year of the Snake on 28 January.

The traditional parade through the heart of the old town will be held on 8 and 9 February.

This city in the heart of Tuscany is home to one of the largest and most vibrant Chinese communities in Europe and it's getting ready for New Year under the sign of the Snake.

The chiming of the Buddhist temple bell will kick off the celebrations on Tuesday 28 January.

There will be a parade and party in Prato old town on 8 and 9 February, with the Procession of the Dragon and the Lion Dance, in the name of integration between communities.

The huge success of the Chinese New Year lies in the fact that Prato is so colourful and multicultural. In 2025 we enter the Year of the Snake, and the Tuscan city is ready to impress once again, preparing to offer tourists and citizens an unforgettable spectacle in which two united and integrated communities are going to shine. In addition to the traditional appointments, the programme of the Chinese New Year in Prato is enriched by food and wine tours and tastings, guided tours of the Buddhist temple, exhibitions, film screenings, and workshops: a busy programme full of surprises that will allow visitors to explore Chinese culture, taking a look at both the past and the present.

At 5 p.m. on Tuesday 28 January, the bells of the Pu Hua Si Buddhist temple will chime to kick off the 2025 Chinese New Year, aligning perfectly with midnight in Beijing. According to the Chinese lunar calendar, we are entering the Year of the Snake, which symbolises wisdom, cunning and intuition. The traditional and eagerly awaited Dragon Procession and Lion Dance are scheduled for Saturday 8 and Sunday 9 February. The celebrations are organised by the Buddhist Association of the Chinese Community in Italy.

Besides being a moment for the people of Prato to meet, this big celebration has become a tourist attraction over the years, precisely because it is unique.

On Saturday 8 February, the party will move through the streets of Macrolotto 1 and 2, the heart of the Chinese community. On Sunday 9 February, it will be the turn of the city centre, with a unique mix of ancient and modern that only Prato can offer. The procession will set off from the Buddhist temple and will first cross the Macrolotto Zero area and then Prato old town, entering the shops in

deference to the Chinese ritual according to which the passage of the Dragon drives away bad luck from the business establishment for the new year that is about to begin.

The climax of **the procession on Sunday 9 February will be in Piazza di Santa Maria delle Carceri**, where the **spectacular Lion Dance** will take place: this unique event is the moment to experience Italy's biggest Chinese community at its best. A precious opportunity for Eastern and Western cultures to meet.

In addition to the traditional initiatives, the Chinese New Year 2025 programme includes other events on various themes, always centred on social and cultural meetings and exchange.

The photographic exhibition, *Xiuxi: at ease! rest: China 1980-1984*, runs from 31 January to 15 February in the evocative Cassero Medievale (viale Piave on the corner of via Cassero, Prato; in collaboration with the Confucius Institute of Turin): 76 shots in black and white by Andrea Cavazzuti, one of the most prominent photojournalists and documentary filmmakers, with forty years' experience in China.

And again, on Friday 7 and Saturday 8, there will be **screenings of two Chinese original language films** with subtitles, in collaboration with the Mabuse cineclub and the Terminale cinema. (Via Carbonaia 31, Prato). *Return to Dust* (2022), by Li Ruijun, offers a picture of rural life, set in the extraordinary settings of Qinghai and Gansu, featuring actors Hai Qing and Wu Renlin. It participated in the Berlin Film Festival and was very successful both in China and Europe. *Only the River Flows* (2023), by Wei Shujun, is based on the bestseller *Torture*, written by Yu Hua. It won the "Un certain regard" award at the Cannes Film Festival in 2023.

On Saturday 8 and Sunday 9 February, the focus shifts to **food**: *Breakfast with Chopsticks!*, curated by writer and mediator Jada Bai at the Xiao Meng Lou restaurant (Via Marini 1, Prato) is an opportunity to learn about Chinese culture by talking and enjoying a rich and typically Chinese breakfast.

Food is also the focus of the **food and wine tour in Macrolotto Zero**, curated by Sarah Manganotti and Le Nuvole di Drago, to explore the different types of Chinese regional cuisine while walking through the neighbourhood, amidst recipes and symbolism always linked to Chinese New Year celebrations.

Creativity takes centre stage on Saturday 8 at Prisma Lab (via Filzi 39S, Prato) with **laboratories and workshops for children and families, dedicated to Chinese masks, comics, dance and pop songs**.

Music will be the key player, on Saturday 8, at the Convitto Nazionale Cicognini (piazza del Collegio 13, Prato), with a performance by the Dong Xun ensemble, celebrating the variety of classical Chinese instruments (free admission subject to availability).

Guided tours of the Buddhist temple Pu Hua Si (Piazza Gualchierina 19, Prato; organised by the Centro Mindfulness Pistoia e Prato association), are not to be missed on Saturday and Sunday. This

is a real cultural hub for the Chinese community in Prato, which has recently enriched its collection with precious statues from the Chinese province of Fujian. A tour to understand some of the concepts that are at the basis of meditation and Buddhist doctrine.

The associations that have joined the Chinese New Year 2025 include **Cardato Riciclato Pratese**, which is preparing to obtain Cardato Recycled certification, a symbol of excellence and tradition, and is going to inaugurate a point of sale in the city.

Also significant is the **tea ceremony**, scheduled to take place on 9 February at the Teatro Metastasio. This event aims to promote the art of the Oriental tea ceremony and the cultural exchange between Prato and Oriental culture. Participants engage in an immersive experience to learn about the tradition of Zen tea and experience moments of calm and introspection. The event is organised by Zente, in partnership with Mindful Peace International - Italy.

Also worth highlighting are the two guided tours organised by The Land Ladies Concierge ETS, on Sunday 9 February, on the theme of **the cultural identity of Prato** and its distinctive features: “Prato - city of art, merchants and biscuits” is a historical and artistic itinerary that aims to make the visitor aware of the roots of the city of Prato and its artistic and cultural heritage in the old town; “Prato, an open-air museum of contemporary art” on the other hand, focuses on contemporary art and aims to show visitors those works of art, be they sculptures, architectural works, or murals, that are scattered throughout the urban fabric of Prato.

The complete and updated programme is available at: <https://www.pratoturismo.it/it/>

The Chinese New Year

The Chinese New Year (or Spring Festival) is celebrated by millions of people around the world. It has no fixed day, because the start of the year has to coincide with the second new moon after the winter solstice, a date that falls between 21 January and 19 February if we follow the Gregorian calendar. On 28 January 2025, we enter the Year of the Serpent, which symbolises wisdom, cunning and intuition. The celebrations last throughout the month of February, with numerous public events. Especially famous is the Lion Dance, with dancers moving lions of different sizes, dancing to music through the streets of cities. The lion is a symbol of strength and courage, so it offers happiness and security for the New Year.

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By plane: Amerigo Vespucci Airport Florence (Peretola) or Galileo Galilei Airport Pisa

By car: recommended exits A1 Calenzano-Sesto Fiorentino, A1 link A11 Firenze Nord, A11 exit Prato Est or Prato Ovest, SP 325 Prato-Bologna

By train: numerous connections every hour with Florence and Bologna at Prato Centrale and Prato Porta al Serraglio stations

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