

http://www.nokaoimagazine.com/article.aspx?article_name=ts_121

Maui No Ka 'Oi Magazine, Jan-Feb 2008

Talk Story

Fresh off the coconut wireless



Kung Hee Fat Choy!

According to the Chinese calendar, February 7 ushers in the Year of the Rat. Bright red banners will fill island streets in celebration of the New Year. The biggest festivities take place on Lahaina's Front Street, in front of historic Wo Hing Temple. Street booths offer lessons in Chinese calligraphy, games for kids, and souvenirs to take home. It's a good time to pick up feng shui mirrors and personalized horoscopes.

Celebratory firecrackers, gongs, and drums are meant to scare away demons. They also announce the arrival of the lion dancers. Two or three dancers twist and jump beneath a traditional lion costume, complete with blinking eyes. The dancers' acrobatic antics require strength and agility. The mask alone weighs as much as thirty-five pounds! Historically, lion dancing was a way for rival martial arts clubs to compete—sometimes violently—in the streets.

Today, it's a fun, interactive cultural experience. You can participate by "feeding" the lion. Tuck a new dollar bill into a lai see, or lucky red envelope, and hand it to the lion as it weaves through the crowd. You can also offer the lion lettuce, which it will shred and toss back, indicating that it has "eaten the green"—a symbol of money.

Days leading up to Chinese New Year are a time to pay off old debts, buy new clothes, and clean house. But when the morning of the New Year arrives, put away the broom and dustpan (so you don't sweep good luck away) and don't cut your hair (lest you cut your life short). Instead, gather with friends and family to eat lucky foods, such as whole steamed fish, mooncakes, and gau (steamed pudding). If you're going to a party, be sure to pick up a ruby-red 'ahi sashimi block—its lucky color makes it especially popular this time of year.

Chinese New Year festivities are also held at Maui Mall, Maui Community College, and Azeka's Shopping Center. Check The Maui News for details. For more about the Lahaina event, call 667-9194 or go to www.visitlahaina.com

—Shannon Wianecki