

People in China are making 3 billion trips to celebrate the Lunar New Year, and it's not going to help the Wuhan coronavirus outbreak

James Pasley Jan 22, 2020, 5:26 PM



Chinese children wear protective masks as they wait to board trains at Beijing Railway station before the annual Spring Festival on January 21, 2020 in Beijing, China.

Kevin Frayer / Getty

- **For 40 days from January 10 to February 18, China celebrates the Lunar New Year Spring Festival, or Chinese New Year.**
- **China's government estimates people will take 3 billion trips to celebrate in the largest annual human migration in the world.**
- **China is also dealing with an outbreak of the Wuhan virus, a deadly coronavirus, that's infected more than 500 people and killed 17.**
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China's [Wuhan coronavirus outbreak](#) couldn't come at a worse time.

From January 10 to February 18, for 40 days, China is celebrating the Lunar New Year Spring Festival, also known as Chinese New Year. Trains, planes, roads, and ferries are filled to the brim as people journey home to be with their families.

The [2019-nCoV virus](#) was first noticed in a meat market in Wuhan, China, which sold animal products like cats and bats, but it's since [spread to Beijing and Shenzhen](#), as well as South Korea, Thailand, and Japan. [One case was reported in the US](#), and airports are screening passengers for the virus.

Travelers are [wearing masks](#) to try and avoid catching it, but one of the best ways to avoid the virus is to [stay away from public places](#). Yet that's difficult in China during the holiday, especially as this new year overlaps with university students' winter break.

By Wednesday, the virus had killed [17 people and infected more than 500](#).

Here's what the [largest annual human migration](#) looks like, and how the virus is impacting it, in photos.

Chunyun, also known as Chinese New Year or Spring Festival, has begun.

Source: [CNN](#)

Over 40 days, from January 10 to February 18, about 3 billion trips will be made by travelers on the move.

Source: [CNN](#)

It's the largest annual human migration in the world. By comparison, the annual Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca usually includes about 2 million people.

Sources: [China Daily](#), [CNN](#), [Business Insider](#)

Stations are filled with masses of passengers waiting for buses, trains, planes, and ferries.

But this year it's complicated with the outbreak of Wuhan virus, or 2019-nCoV. The virus, which has pneumonia-like symptoms, was first noted in Wuhan, a city of 11 million people in central China.

Sources: [Insider](#), [Insider](#), [The Diplomat](#)

Officials still don't know everything about the virus, but it helps to wear face masks, as well as staying out of crowded public places — which makes the timing of the virus particularly bad.

Source: [Los Angeles Times](#)

The point of Chunyun is to celebrate family. It's focused on reunion and hope.

Source: [National Geographic](#)

But now many are anxious about the virus, and fear a repeat of the SARS virus in 2002 and 2003, which killed 774 people. Face masks have sold out across the country.

Sources: [AP News](#), [CDC](#)

It's the earliest Chinese New Year in eight years, and could result in additional congestion issues since the holiday overlaps with university students' winter break.

Source: [CNN](#)

On top of that, across the country, monitoring for signs of the virus has increased. Passengers leaving Wuhan by train, plane, or bus are having their temperatures checked. The Chinese government has asked people to cancel plans to visit Wuhan.

Sources: [Insider](#), [South China Morning Post](#)

The Wuhan virus can be transmitted by humans, and is no longer contained in China. Cases have been found in Thailand, South Korea, and Japan. People leaving China face delays in places like the US and Thailand, which are screening arrivals from China.

Sources: [Insider](#), [The New York Times](#)

Chinese President Xi Jinping is taking it seriously. On China's public radio, he said it was "extremely crucial" to stop the virus. He also said the government should "ensure that the masses have a quiet, peaceful and joyous Spring Festival."

Sources: [The New York Times](#), [The Diplomat](#)

So virus withstanding, the holiday continues. China follows the Gregorian calendar, but the holiday is based on the moon's movements. This year, the Lunar New Year falls on January 25.

China celebrates for another 15 days after that. The Year of the Pig ends, and the Year of the Rat begins.

Source: [CNBC](#)

As China celebrates, red decorations are used everywhere. The color represents prosperity.

Source: [National Geographic](#)

Fireworks and lantern festivals are part of it, too, though they've decreased some as the government has tried to improve air quality. As of 2018, about 444 cities had banned or limited fireworks sales.

Sources: [National Geographic](#), [Global Times](#)

Peak travel days were expected to be January 20 to January 22, and again on January 31 to February 1.

Source: [CNN](#)

One of the main causes of congestion is China's commuting work population. About 20% of China's population lives in rural areas but travels to cities to work, and many of them head home for the holiday.

Source: [Smithsonian Magazine](#)

Thousands of train services will be running to keep people moving, including bullet trains that go 185 mph. The country unveiled one that can go 217 mph earlier this month.

Sources: [CNN](#), [Business Insider](#)

Staff were prepped and ready to work on the largest rail network in the world.

Source: [CNN](#)

According to Chinese government estimations, of the 3 billion trips, 440 million will be by train. Since last year's festivities, China built about 5,275 miles of new railroad.

Sources: [China Daily](#), [CNN](#)

China's government is also giving discounted tickets to people who take a "reverse route," trying to incentivize people to leave their rural towns and go celebrate in cities.

Source: [China Daily](#)

Even so, the majority of journeys will be in cars. China's government estimates there will be about 2.43 billion road trips. This is a motorway during the holiday season back in 2018.

Source: [CNN](#)

It's a slow, tiring trip for many.

And the stress on infrastructure is no laughing matter. In 2016, snow and freezing temperatures stranded 100,000 people at a single train station. China deployed 2,600 police guards to to maintain order.

Source: [The Guardian](#)

Some Hong Kong protesters are using the holiday to continue calling for

independence from China. As recently as January 1, 400 protesters were arrested during a march that turned violent.

Source: [NBC News](#)

For many, Chunyun is the best part of the year, and worth the congestion to see friends and family.

But this year will have the added challenge of not getting sick.

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