

# Celebrating the Chinese New Year: How to throw a Year of the Sheep party that is the Baaaaamb

We have finally finished celebrating the Year of the Sheep/Goat.



Yes, I know. If ever a family milked the goat dry or sheared every last scrap of wool off the sheep, we've done it this year.



From watching a Lion Dance to completing an unbelievable number of craft activities, to hosting parties in both our boys' classrooms, to making homemade dumplings, to joining fellow China adoption friends for our annual dinner, we have absolutely marked the Chinese New Year.



But the holiday isn't over until we've opened our home to family and friends—and that is, in fact, a tradition that is authentic in China. The animal-themed crafts may or may not be, but having a house party is legit.



*Almost ready for the party, so the boys are forbidden from touching anything but the iPad.*

Every year, even though John assures me that our house is not growing, we add a few more people to the guest list. And every year, I wish we had added a few more. Because I may not know how to throw a party, but the Chinese New Year party always comes together.



Part of it is because the expectations are so low. People who haven't come before think they will show up for a little Chinese food. But that's not how we work.

We have crafts, and lots of them. This year the children made dragon fans, Billy Goats Gruff bridges to go with the finger puppets—deeply discounted sets I got from Oriental Trading—and cotton ball sheep on sticks.



We played Chinese New Year bingo with the wheel I also found on Oriental Trading. We had an enthusiastic group. The Bingo competition was hotter than a Hunan pepper, as my boys say about spicy food.



And the food! I cooked a few dishes, other guests brought some, I ordered a lot more than I meant to, and we could have fed a crowd twice the size of the one we crowded into our house.



The day before the party I called one of my friends, Daniel's godmother. She had offered to bring something, and I knew she meant it.

"Would you mind making a cake or cupcakes?" I asked her. "Maybe it could be a sheep cake?"

That is asking a lot, I know. Still, when she arrived at our door, she and her family were carrying two sheep cakes and some extra "Happy New Years" written on a plate in icing.



She is a true friend—and a chef and artist, as well.

I mean, look at these.



Unbelievably wonderful.



And her husband? He was the only one who could figure out how to put together the cardboard bridges for the Billy Goats Gruff. Everyone brings something to the party.



Later that evening, after the guests had gone home and the boys were asleep, I realized I completely forgot to take out the bubble wrap so we could pop it and call it fireworks. If you have a party that's so much fun that you forget the fireworks, you probably did OK.



Tonight I was on the phone with my mother and sister, and my sister and I started discussing next year, the Year of the Monkey.

I have spent weeks focusing on Chinese New Year, as we have celebrated it in two states, connecting with family, longtime friends, and new acquaintances, merging legitimate tradition with simple fun. Yet it was only tonight, as my sister was Googling monkey cakes and as I was describing my vision for slicing round cakes to make a monkey cake, that my mother spoke up.

"You're talking about next year?" she said. "This is getting out of hand."

My mother may be right. But she knows there's no stopping this high-speed bullet train. It left the station long ago.



Wishing you all the best in this Year of the Sheep or Goat!