



Lunar New year celebration - February Coffee Morning

By Caroline Davis & Anna Magyar - Photos by Chiyono Oba

Country Club in Johor Bahru in the Hop Sing restaurant. The impressive main building boasts a lovely second floor balcony with archways that allow a wonderful view of the golf course and grounds. The atmosphere in our private room at the Hop Sing was very festive and several of the guests were wearing the traditional Chinese dress called the "cheongsam".

Two of our members, Mayrie and Christine, were kind enough to give us an interesting lesson about the traditions associated with this important and lengthy holiday. We learned that an important part of Chinese New Year is the ceremonial sweeping and cleaning of the home which is to be done on the eve of the new year. The old bad luck is swept out to make way for the new good luck. There is a specific day when married women go home to visit their parents. Also, children and un-married people are given the red packets, or "ang pao", with money inside. Oranges are given, always two at a time, when one goes visiting parents and relatives.

Oranges are then given back in return, to symbolize giving and receiving. The word for orange in Chinese sounds like the word for gold, so they are auspicious.

We were then given a demonstration of how to prepare the customary "Yee Sang" meal, also referred to as the "prosperity toss". When the trays for the "Yee Sang" were brought out, each table helped assemble the dish while learning the significance of the many ingredients. Once the dish was ready, everyone simultaneously "tossed" the salad high with her chopsticks while saying out loud her wishes for the new year. Each person shouts out the things she wants or needs, such as health, prosperity, beauty, happiness and weight loss! It was great noisy fun and the salad was delicious.

We then had several other courses including soup, chicken, fish, rice and vegetables.

We learned that the origin of the "prosperity toss" or "Yee Sang", is not from China, but from this region. The Chinese ancestors who first came here were poor and established



the tradition. The "toss" of the salad is a metaphor for "lifting" themselves up to prosperity and out of their difficult situation.

The lucky draw winners of the day went home with not only fond memories, but also a bouquet of flowers and a voucher for the next coffee morning. I can only hope that all our events will be as cheerful and as crowded as this Chinese New Year celebration was.

Happy, Healthy and Prosperous New Year!

