



ARTS & CULTURE

Vietnamese Mark Lunar New Year with Traditional Fish Release

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Vietnam launched preparations for the Lunar New Year with a fish release on Thursday. The tradition involves releasing fish called carp into rivers and lakes in the country a week before the the holiday known as Tet officially begins.

The tradition comes from an ancient story of three “Kitchen Gods.” The three, two males and a female, take a ride on the brightly colored carp at the end of the year. They go to Heaven to meet with the Jade Emperor, the God who rules there. The Kitchen Gods report news about the families they represent to seek the emperor’s care and protection. Their efforts help to keep the kitchen fires burning, and families happy and healthy.

Vietnamese believe the fish release brings good luck to their families.

As the gods go to Heaven, families clean their houses in preparation to celebrate Tet. A clean house, Vietnamese believe, will bring luck in the new year. On Lunar New Year's Eve, the gods will return to earth and their duties in the kitchen of the house.

“Releasing the fish makes me feel better about myself,” said Nguyen Hong Nhung of Hanoi. “It’s like I’ve done a good **deed**, so I’ll be luckier in the new year.”

Thursday’s event, which takes place across Vietnam, was more restrained than in years past because of the new coronavirus. It is spreading in several northern areas of the country.

However, Vietnam has increased **contact tracing**, mass testing, and **quarantine** measures to slow the spread. The aggressive action has limited infections in the country to 1,948 cases. Vietnam has reported only 35 deaths from COVID-19.

A fast-spreading coronavirus **variant** from Britain is the cause of the latest increase in cases.

“Vietnamese will still follow the tradition of releasing the fish, but COVID-19 has made people keep a safe distance,” said Tran Van Toi as he released carp from a plastic bag at Hanoi’s West Lake.

Thich Tinh Giac, a Buddhist monk, noted, “This year, due to COVID, there are fewer people releasing fish here, but there is a major change in **attitude** towards plastic bags,” Giac said.

“After years of persuasion, now they don’t throw the plastic bags into the water anymore but collect them to be recycled.”

The Lunar New Year is also celebrated in China, Korea, Laos, Tibet and other Asian countries.

I’m Mario Ritter, Jr.

Hai Do adapted this story for Learning English with additional reporting from Reuters. Caty Weaver was the editor.

Words in This Story

deed - *n.* something that is done: an act or action

contact tracing - *n.* the practice of identifying, notifying, and monitoring individuals who may have had close contact with a person having a confirmed or probable case of an infectious disease as a means of controlling the spread of infection

quarantine - *n.* the situation of being kept away from others to prevent a disease from spreading

variant - *n.* different in some way from others of the same kind

attitude - *n.* the way you think and feel about someone or something

