

Tradition Meets Trend as Chinese New Year Ignites Food and Drink Demand

17 February 2026 | News

The Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China has launched a nationwide shopping campaign running from 15 to 23 February



The Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China has launched a nationwide shopping campaign running from 15 to 23 February

China's food and beverage sector is taking centre stage this Lunar New Year, as extended holidays, travel surges and policy support combine to fuel festive spending across the country.

The 2026 Spring Festival, marking the Year of the Fire Horse, comes with an unprecedented nine-day public holiday, creating fresh momentum for reunion dinners, gifting and celebratory banquets. For many households, the New Year's Eve feast remains the emotional and culinary pinnacle of the year, where dishes symbolising prosperity and abundance are paired with traditional drinks.

Strong spirits such as Kweichow Moutai and Wuliangye continue to dominate banquet tables, particularly in northern China, where repeated 'ganbei' (干杯) toasts are a hallmark of hospitality. Premium baijiu remains a popular corporate and family gift, reflecting both status and goodwill. At the same time, younger consumers are diversifying tastes, opting for imported wines, craft beers and low-alcohol alternatives as health consciousness grows.

Restaurant chains are reporting brisk bookings. Hot pot giant Haidilao said reservations for reunion dinners have climbed sharply, with more than 1,000 outlets operating on New Year's Eve to meet demand. The trend highlights a broader shift: while home-cooked meals remain central, more families are choosing to celebrate in restaurants, easing preparation burdens and elevating the dining experience.

E-commerce is also booming. Data from JD.com show that since the launch of its New Year Goods Festival in late January, searches for festive items have risen more than fourfold year on year. Red clothing, horse-themed ornaments and elaborate food gift boxes are among the most sought-after products. Citrus fruits prized for their symbolic association with luck and wealth are seeing particularly strong demand, especially from production hubs in Guangxi.

Policy support is reinforcing the consumption drive. The Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China has launched a nationwide shopping campaign running from 15 to 23 February, promoting festive dining, retail discounts and cultural tourism events. Local governments have rolled out dining vouchers and targeted subsidies to stimulate spending in catering and hospitality.

The extended holiday has also amplified travel-linked consumption. As millions criss-cross the country for family reunions, airports, railway hubs and highway service areas are witnessing spikes in ready-to-eat meals, snacks and beverage sales. Regional delicacies are travelling further than ever, with specialty sausages from Sichuan, seafood from coastal provinces and traditional rice cakes from the Yangtze Delta finding new buyers through cold-chain logistics and express delivery.

Meanwhile, supermarkets are expanding premium imported food sections, catering to urban consumers seeking novelty alongside tradition. Sparkling wines and boutique chocolates now sit beside classic New Year staples such as dumplings and whole fish, symbolising abundance. The coexistence of heritage flavours and global influences underscores the evolution of China's festive table.

Beyond sheer volume, analysts note a qualitative shift. The rising middle class is prioritising "emotional value" immersive dining experiences, premium ingredients and culturally resonant products over simple quantity. Whether through a lavish baijiu toast, a restaurant hot pot feast, or carefully curated online gift boxes, food and drink remain the heart of China's most important holiday, serving not only as sustenance but as a powerful expression of reunion, prosperity and renewal.