



A traveler heads to the international departures area at the airport in Beijing yesterday ahead of the Lunar New Year. — AFP/AP photos



This picture taken on February 5, 2016 shows a Chinese tourist holding incense sticks as she offers prayers at the Erawan shrine.

New Year, new travel: More Chinese choose tourism over tradition

While hundreds of millions of his Chinese compatriots pack into planes, trains, and automobiles to return to their ancestral homes for the Lunar New Year celebration, Zhang Hao, 30, is getting as far away as he can. "I decided to go abroad this year because my parents are pressuring me to marry," he said.

Instead of making the 1,200 kilometer trek from Beijing, where he works as a designer, to his icy northern hometown of Harbin, Zhang booked a 20,000 yuan (\$3,000) trip to Thailand for February 6 — one day before Chinese custom would dictate he ought to be with his parents. The festival, which compares in importance to Christmas in the West, marks a time when far-flung family members return home for merriment and meals according to tradition, they must be back by midnight on the eve of the New Year. But rising individualism and financial independence are seeing more and more young Chinese choose to defy custom, while at the same time tourism and outbound travel are surging.

'Growing up'

"There was no choice" but to go abroad, Zhang said. "It's mostly the generation who grew up in the 90s who are taking off because they were by their parents' side the whole time they were growing up." He is not alone. More than 30 percent of Chinese planning a break over the holiday, also known as Spring Festival, say they are doing so because they want to "get far away from relatives" or feel that "spending New Year at home is getting boring," according to a



This picture taken on February 5, 2016 shows tourists including Chinese offering prayers at the Erawan shrine in downtown Bangkok.

customer survey by Chinese travel planning and booking website Mafengwo.

Growing numbers are also seizing the opportunity for tourism, despite slowing growth in the world's second-largest economy. The China Youth Daily devoted its entire opinion page to the issue on Friday, with writer Chen Fang saying that many people now

resent going home because of boredom and stress, while children are less excited about customary gifts such as new clothing.

"I prefer to view Spring Festival as a slightly longer holiday," Chen wrote. "Wherever the people are, wherever the family is, that's where the festival is." But Huang Wei argued in a contrasting column that the ancestral hearth was critical. "When I was young and unmarried, going home for Lunar New Year to spend time with my parents was merely a way to carry on an ancient tradition," he said. "Now that I'm over 40 and a husband and father as well as a son, reuniting the family for Spring Festival is a great responsibility."

'More independent'

The Chinese government estimates that 2.91 billion trips of all kinds will be taken over the holiday's 40-day travel season, in what is thought to be the largest yearly movement of people in the world. Mafengwo said that among its festival season bookings, 40 percent were for tourist travel—twice the proportion of two years ago, although some were going with relatives. Practicality was increasingly trumping tradition, Hong Kong University sociology professor Gary Wong said.

"One of the most important elements is that it's the longest period of holiday for the whole year," he said. But older generations, he added, "still prefer to have the whole family get together." Nearly six million people, the most ever, will pack their bags for a leisure destination during the coming week, China's biggest outbound travel portal Ctrip estimated last month, which said its bookings were up 15 percent from 2015. — AFP



People walk past an entrance gate of Ditan Park decorated with red lanterns ahead of the Chinese Lunar New Year in Beijing.

No Super Bowl halftime show for Metallica

While Metallica has steadily attracted more of a mainstream audience throughout its 35-year career, frontman James Hetfield feels they will never play the Super Bowl, and he doesn't seem to mind. "As far as us playing halftime for the Super Bowl, I have a feeling that ship has passed," Hetfield told The Associated Press before a sound check on Friday in San Francisco.

He added: "We're not a variety show. We're not pop. We're not sparkly, and all that kind of stuff that seems to be what's needed for that." While not sparkly, pop, or a variety act, the band is more versed at rocking your socks off, so playing The Night Before concert Saturday at AT&T Park provides a better alternative for their devoted fan base.

"It's great to be hosting the thing. It would be great if my team was in it," Hetfield said of his team, the Oakland Raiders. "But having the city come alive with any kind of sport is great. The fact that we're here getting to represent Bay area music at The Night Before is pretty exciting." Because the band is not currently on tour, Hetfield joked about the set list.

"All covers, no. All Coldplay, not even that, no. We're going to be doing probably a best of, you know, when you're in a situation like this, you know stadium, catchy, bouncy, and heavy, which we do," Hetfield said. Coldplay will play the Super Bowl Halftime Show on Sunday with special guest Beyoncé.

At the sound check for Saturday's



James Hetfield of the band Metallica performs at the Super Bowl 50 Metallica Soundcheck held at AT&T Park on Friday, Feb 5, 2016, in San Francisco. — AP

concert, the band gave a few devoted members of their fan club a taste of what they can expect, playing classics like "Master of Puppets," and "(Welcome Home) Sanitarium." Hetfield also reflected on the recent passing of musicians such as David Bowie, Glenn Frey (of The Eagles) and Maurice White (from Earth, Wind, and Fire).

"It's always sad when brothers, musical brothers pass on - go on to the next gig or the next journey," he said. "They're dying of natural causes. Age, age-related stuff. That's bet-

ter than hearing about a Kurt Cobain or a Layne Staley, something where they've inflicted that upon themselves." But it was the death of Motorhead founder Ian "Lemmy" Kilmister, late last year, that seemed to affect Hetfield the most.

"He single-handedly inspired Metallica to be Metallica. That was a tough one, a real tough one. The fact that he lived the life he wanted to and pretty much died doing what he wanted, that's key," Hetfield said. — AP

Iggy Azalea: I have more belief in myself as a trendsetter

As Iggy Azalea readies the release of her sophomore album, the rapper says she's feeling more self-assured and less worried about being or sounding cool. "I think I'm more confident, and I think I have more belief in what I think is cool rather than worrying about what other people are going to like," Azalea said in an interview Friday. "I think I have more belief in myself in being a trendsetter, which all artists should. So I hope to maybe move the dial a little bit more than I did last time," she added.

The 25-year-old made the comments before she performed at a Sports Illustrated pre-Super Bowl Party in San Francisco - a city she said she loves visiting. Azalea said she wasn't attending Sunday's Super Bowl in Santa Clara, California, but she's happy to watch Beyoncé, Bruno Mars and Coldplay perform during the halftime show.

"I have to go home and work, but I will be watching

them on television. I'm excited to watch them at home," the pink-haired performer said. She signed autographs and took photos with fans outside of the 1015 Folsom nightclub, and inside she shook hands with concertgoers in the loud crowd while also performing songs like "Fancy" and "Black Widow."

Azalea said her new album will be released "this half of the year." It won't include as many guest artists as her Grammy-nominated debut, "The New Classic," she said. "Less features than last time. I went a bit feature crazy," she said of the 2014 album, which included songs co-starring Jennifer Hudson, mentor T.I., reggae artist Mavado and pop singers Rita Ora and Charli XCX.

"I'm hoping people will see my growth, being able to hold my own on a song without needing somebody else's companionship," she added. "But I still will do some features because I love that, too." — AP



Iggy Azalea performs at the Sports Illustrated Super Bowl Party held at 1015 Folsom on Friday, Feb. 5, 2016, in San Francisco. — AP

Hop on down: Miffy the rabbit gets her own museum

To some she's just a plain white bunny, to others she's a prime example of minimalist art. But for six decades Miffy has been delighting young kids around the world, and now she's getting a museum of her own.

After a two-year renovation project, what was formerly known as the Dick Bruna Huis (house) in the Centraal Museum of the Dutch city of Utrecht, is reopening this weekend as a bright, playful space dedicated to Miffy herself and carefully re-imagined as a hands-on experience for her young fans.

The original space devoted to Miffy's creator-Dutch artist, author and graphic designer, Dick Bruna, who was born in Utrecht—opened in 2006 and drew some 50,000 visitors a year from all over the Netherlands, but also largely from Japan where she is a huge star. But it was primarily more of an adult museum, packed full of a permanent collection of Bruna's original drawings. And the question on every child's lips was "where's Miffy?" said curator Yolanda van den Berg.

So now children are getting an invitation to visit Miffy's house—divided into 10 rooms designed specifically with kids in mind, where they can play and learn, and find out a little more about the man who created their idol. Although she celebrated her 60th birthday in 2015, Miffy has changed very little down the years. Bruna wrote more than 120 picture books of which 32 are devoted just to Miffy. Small and square, designed to fit little hands, each book tells a simple tale such as a outing to the zoo, a day at school or playing in the snow.

They have sold more than 85 million copies and been translated into more than 52 languages, including Russian in 2011. It is her endearing simplicity, along with her friends like Poppy the kind pig lady and Snuffy the dog, which has cemented the books' universal appeal to pre-schoolers down the decades.

Room for imagination

Miffy is a white girl bunny drawn with thick black outlines, pointy ears (although in her early days they were slightly more floppy), two dots for eyes, and an X for her mouth. She is always drawn against a background of bold primary colours, especially mixed for Bruna, mainly blue, green, yellow and what is known as "Bruna red".

"What he wanted to do with his books was to create a safe world in which children can explore by themselves," said Van den Berg. "And that's what we've tried to do in the museum as well." Absent from the museum though are the computer animations and games seen in many exhibits today. "If it's not a real experience, but a virtual one, it's different," said Van den Berg.

Bruna, 88, was born in Utrecht in 1927, and had been expected to follow his father's footsteps and join the family publishing company, which was once the largest in the Netherlands. But drawing and art were his first love, and during a long study tour in Paris in the 1940s he became heavily influenced by the works of French painters Henri Matisse and Fernand Leger.

Returning to Utrecht, he started drawing book covers for the novels published by the Bruna company. It was during a family holiday in 1955 on the North Sea coast that he spotted a white rabbit hopping around the garden, and turned it into a drawing for his young son Sierk. Thus Miffy was born.

The simple pictograms in the Miffy books "have room for imagination and fantasy. They're very clear lines," said Evaline Reeskamp, education officer with the museum. Bruna himself retired in 2011, and now the Utrecht museum has faithfully preserved his fastidiously neat, light-filled top floor studio where he worked for 30 years, and opened it up to the public to visit. — AFP



A photo taken on February 3, 2016 shows books on display at the Miffy Museum in Utrecht. To some she's just a plain white bunny, to others she's a prime example of minimalist art. But for six decades Miffy has been delighting young kids around the world, and now she's getting a museum of her own. — AFP