

# What to Expect From 2015, The Year of The Goat

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Goat figurines on sale in Russia leading up to the New Year.

After a tumultuous 2014, many Russians who light-heartedly turn to the Chinese astrological calendar for cues during their New Year's celebrations may welcome the symbol of the coming year — a timid, amiable sheep.

Depending on the translation, the animal may also be known as a goat or a ram, but whatever its name, astrology websites, and many of the Russians who develop a humorous interest in them around this time of the year, agree that the ruminant is much more easygoing than the tempestuous horse that symbolized 2014.

Although factors other than astrology were no doubt involved, President Vladimir Putin calmly proposed in mid-December that Russia's economic troubles might resolve themselves if Russians simply waited until oil prices rose and the ruble stabilized. "Is it possible? It's possible," Putin said at his annual news conference.

Compared to typical Kremlin rhetoric, the remark sounded almost sheepish.

The year of the goat is supposed to be an auspicious one, as holiday websites in Russia are quick to tell their readers, though none seemed ready to guarantee that Russia's deflated currency would heed presidential or astrological predictions of stability.

But with that grace the nation has sometimes been known to exhibit in the face of crises, many Russians seemed eager to separate the sheep from the goats and put aside their grievances to enjoy the holidays.

This holiday disregard might have been on the mind of former President Boris Yeltsin when he announced his resignation on New Year's Eve in 1999 — timing that ensured the news caused less public reaction than it might have on an ordinary day. Similarly this year, a Moscow court abruptly rescheduled a verdict hearing against opposition leader Alexei Navalny to Dec. 30 — when it pronounced him guilty.

Although the Chinese New Year is more than a month away — it starts on Feb. 19, based on the lunar calendar — Russians often include the symbol of the upcoming year in their New Year's festivities.

Stores are carrying sheep-shaped trinkets and baubles in this year's shades of blue and green, because the Chinese astrological calendar assigns each year a color in addition to an animal.

Blue and green are supposed to be lucky colors to wear on New Year's Eve, while lucky foods are supposed to include herbs and salad greens — which the herbivorous sheep seems to favor.

Sheep's milk Parmesan from Italy may have been banished from Russian shelves by Moscow's sanctions on Western food imports, but holiday websites insist that all other varieties of cheese are welcome on the menu too: The sheep seems to like dairy products, at least as far as astrologers can tell.

Yet the year may turn out to be less amiable than astrologers predict. The Russian government seems eager to have somebody take the fall for the country's economic troubles, so 2015 might end up the "year of the scapegoat," in a term popularized by French band Dagoba.

And for any Russians wishing for a ruble recovery in the New Year, a continued crisis could turn 2015 into the year of the "wolf in sheep's clothes."

Then again, there's no wolf among the 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac. So perhaps after all it's best to just put any troubles aside and enjoy the holidays — as Russia was bound to do anyway.

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