Dr. Richard Kelley is traveling. His column will return next week.

Year of the Monkey

By Kathy Foley

The Year of the Monkey starts Feb. 8, 2016, the Chinese New Year, and ends Jan. 27, 2017, next Chinese New Year’s Eve. The date for Chinese New Year changes every year because unlike the calendar we use in the Western world (which is also widely used in China), which is strictly related to the motion of the Earth around the sun, the Chinese calendar depends on both the moon and the sun.

It is traditional in China to name each year in accordance with the Chinese zodiac calendar. The zodiac – both the Chinese and Western (originating in ancient Greek mythology) versions – is based on the richly imagined, long-ago, pre-scientific mapping of the heavens. The Western zodiac gave different parts of the night sky names such as Aries, Gemini, Leo, etc. – for a total of 12. In the Chinese zodiac calendar, each year is named for one of a dozen animals, so that every 12 years, the year of that animal recurs. The Monkey, this coming year’s animal, occupies the ninth position in the Chinese zodiac. The year now ending has been the Year of the Sheep.

Each animal’s characteristics and traits are used to describe those born in “their” year. For instance, because I was born in the Year of the Rat – which specific year is not to be revealed to readers of Saturday Briefing – I am considered to have the traits that Chinese zodiac tradition ascribes to the Rat. According to http://astrologyclub.org/rat-horoscope-2016/, the Rat is anxious not to be a failure, is friendly, elegant and generous, and lives for today. When it comes to socializing and light-hearted banter, the Rat is a clever animal and takes the best possible advantage of all situations. Rats tend to be gullible and fall into traps, but they learn from experience and don’t make the same mistake twice. A Rat’s outer calm hides an inner aggressive restlessness. This sounds a bit like the way characteristics are said to be attributed to people born under various signs in the zodiac of Western astrology. (Note: Astrology should never be confused with astronomy. Astrology is simply ancient myths, with no basis in scientific fact, while astronomy is the scientific study of stars and other objects in space.)

For the most part, I found this horoscope spot on. (However, a friend cautions me that the clever people who created the descriptions of zodiacal characteristics and who write horoscopes today tend to fill these descriptions with traits that most people can relate to, which can make them think, “Why, that’s me!”) You can read about your zodiac sign on http://goo.gl/1Ci1WC. Look for the box “Find Your Chinese Zodiac Sign,” enter your date of birth and search. It’s a lot of fun to read, especially if it’s a good year for you! But don’t take it seriously. It’s not real-world information you should consider acting on.

Interestingly, the Chinese zodiac can affect birth rates in a given year. Because some signs are preferred over others, they can affect some couples’ plans for when to have a baby. And boom and bust years for babies can affect business.

Before we get back to the Chinese zodiac (see Page 2), while we’re thinking about business in China, we should keep in mind that China is a major market for some of our Outrigger resorts. So it is worth looking into Chinese travel habits. See chart at right to find out which of our properties have the biggest slice of the Chinese traveler pie.

According to the China Tourism Research Institute:

• China had 61.9 million outbound travelers in the first half of 2015, an increase of 12.1 percent compared to the same period in 2014.

• Asia still dominates China’s outbound tourism market, with Thailand No. 5 in the top 10 outbound destinations for the first half of 2015.

• Thailand was the No. 1 destination for Chinese tourists whose travel was arranged by travel agencies in the first quarter of 2015.
Comparing China's outbound tourism data on holidays with that of the previous year, the total number of outbound tourists grew 10 percent over the previous year during the Chinese New Year travel period. What has Outrigger done to capture a share of this growing market?

- We opened a sales and marketing office in Beijing in March 2015 with satellite offices in Shanghai and Guangzhou.
- We launched our Chinese-language website, http://www.outriggerresorts.cn/, in July 2015. It is written in Mandarin and designed to further increase Outrigger's engagement with Chinese-speaking travelers and guests.
- We are developing the Outrigger Clearwater Bay Resort on the island of Hainan in the south of China. It will add 499 keys to a cluster of five-star Hainan hotels in 2018. Our brand presence in China is critical to the recognition of the Outrigger name when travelers from that country look for a resort to book abroad.

What else can we do?

- We should give prospective Chinese guests what they want! An example cited on CNN is something Emirates Airlines did. The carrier recognized that Chinese travelers come home with a lot more baggage than they had when they left on vacation, so it increased its luggage allowance and won a tremendous share of the Chinese market. The top three reasons why Chinese travel are 1) to sightsee, 2) to experience other cultures and 3) to relax. However, shopping is also right up there, and their spending is forecast to triple!
- We can think about the Chinese zodiac too! Why? Because that helps determine what Chinese guests and prospective guests will want! Yes, Chinese consumer culture, consuming habits and purchasing decisions are often influenced by product packaging, appearance, presentation and marketing that reflect the zodiac year. So, to increase sales, each year we could consider appropriate zodiac-related and -named packaging or specials. This year, for example, they could have a Monkey theme.
- With 80 percent of the typical Chinese traveler's vacation-purchases budget made on location, retailers and restaurants also have a great opportunity to increase income with Year of the Monkey specials, packaging, presentations and products. So as we look forward to welcoming more Chinese visitors to our properties across the globe this year, let's also take a look at what http://astrologyclub.org/chinese-horoscope/2016-year-monkey/ says the Year of the Monkey has in store:
  - A year of both positives and negatives and where anything can happen. (A zodiac skeptic might say you don’t have to have been born in the Year of the Monkey for such a broad prediction to apply to you!)
  - Things will get accomplished but largely through personal and individual efforts. Group movements like political upheaval or revolutions will not make their mark. (Let's hope that's true!)
  - The Monkey increases communication, humor and wit and will help us get through stressful times with grace and ease.
  - Business flourishes and risks pan out.
  - With the Monkey's gift for finding unconventional solutions to old problems, daring to be different can lead to success.
  - Be on the alert for deception. (Good advice for everyone, not just Monkeys!)
  - Rethink your fitness program, diet and health plan. Everyone should start some form of regular physical activity this year. The body was designed to move. Honor it. (This is not from me! But, again, it does sound like good advice for everyone, not just Monkeys!)
  - There will be an upturn as far as finances, politics and real estate are concerned; however, there will be a decided undercurrent of insecurity.
  - For the individual, move forward and make strides this year.
  - For business, run with ideas, embrace the inventive, don't look back!

The Year of the Monkey is said to be good for taking risks, being rebellious; a year where agile, inventive minds, sheer guts and boldness will win out. It’s a time to be courageous, take action, start new endeavors – destined to succeed under the Monkey’s influence. Those who can hang on for the wild ride, outsmart the confidence-trickster and bluff their way through will come out unscathed. Those who are dull or slow-witted and can’t handle the stress will come unglued. (Again, that’s what the zodiac says. But take it with a huge grain of salt. It has no basis in science or reality.)

As we usher in the Monkey and bid aloha to the Sheep, I vote that we hang on for the wild ride with the hope that business flourishes and risks pan out. Imua (move forward), Outrigger, and Happy New Year!