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Felix Celebrates Festivals Around the World · Vol. 9

Cheerful Letters from the Travelling Bunny Rabbit

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1 photo and 1 craft template / € 18.00

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Back cover:

At the end of January, Sophie's schoolfriend Liang proudly tells the class about his family's preparations for New Year. Can that be true? Do people in China really celebrate the New Year much later than we do?

Felix wants to find out more! And so he sets off on an adventure that takes him to the New Year festivities in China, and the loveliest festivals all round the world. And he's not alone!

Six real letters with some extra surprises bring his round-the-world trip to life, and give even the youngest children useful knowledge about the world's different cultures.

Felix goes to festivals all round the world

Cheerful letters from the travelling bunny rabbit

A story by Annette Langen

With pictures by Constanza Droop

It happened in the first lesson one icy Monday morning in January: everyone in Sophie's class was telling each other what they had done at the weekend. Since the weather was so wintry, Sophie and her family had gone ice-skating on the thickly frozen Aasee lake. Liang, whose daddy comes from China, proudly told the class that his family had been getting ready for New Year, buying new clothes and cleaning everything.

Liang hadn't even finished speaking before Malte burst out: "What? Did you sleep through New Year's Eve or something? It's January already!" He laughed so much he fell off his chair – and his two friends laughed with him. Everyone else was looking at Liang in surprise, which made him go bright red. "New Year was ages ago," Sophie's best friend Johanna whispered. Azra and Benedict nodded and murmured: "Yes, it was in the Christmas holidays."

Then the bell rang and breaktime began. Liang ran out into the playground and looked like he wanted the ground to swallow him up.

Sophie could see how terrible Liang felt. Malte and his friends had laughed at her once, too, because she still believed in Santa Claus. But then her cuddly rabbit Felix had gone off on his trip to the North Pole, where he met the real Santa. Felix had been on some brilliant adventures, all over the world, but he always wrote her letters from his travels, and he always came back home to her in the end. The two of them had known each other forever – since they had shared a cot when Sophie was a baby, to be exact. Felix always understood Sophie, and Sophie always knew what the cuddly rabbit wanted to tell her.

Maybe her best-ever-friend Felix would know if they celebrated New Year much later in China! Sophie wanted to ask him straight away. But she couldn't! Naturally, the little rabbit wasn't allowed to come to school with her. He had to wait for her in her room. After the last lesson, Sophie couldn't wait to get home.

"Felix!" She shouted from downstairs in the hall, chucking her schoolbag into the corner. "Felix, you'll never believe what happened at school today." She dashed up the stairs and disappeared into her bedroom.

Felix listens carefully to what went on at school. Then he waggles his ears. "You mean I should look on the internet?" Sophie asks, and rushes down to the living room. Her heart beats faster as she opens the laptop and types in: "China + New Year". In less than a flash, the words pop up: "The Chinese celebration of New Year takes place in January or February. It is also called the Spring Festival and is as important as Christmas is for Christians."

"Liang's right!" she cries, reaching for the phone. She has to tell Johanna at once! The two of them chat and chat. And so Sophie doesn't notice that her cuddly rabbit has suddenly got itchy feet again. Late at night, when she is fast asleep, his little bell rings...

The next morning, Felix is not lying next to Sophie in bed, and his little red checked suitcase has vanished. Sophie suspects that her little bunny has set off on a new adventure. A few days later, an express letter finally arrives. It says:

Post for the best Sophie in the world

Martinistrasse 19

48143 Münster

Germany

Envelope 1:

These characters mean luck and wealth

From: Felix, currently in Beijing

That's the capital of China

Landed in the capital of China, in the drizzle.

Ni hao, Sophie,

I landed in Beijing just in time. It's the new moon, and this is where the real New Year celebrations take place, so Zhen Zhen (pronounced shin shin) tells me. She has four whole weeks off school for it! Isn't that brilliant? There's a lot of hustle and bustle, because everyone goes to visit their families over the holidays. All the doors are decorated with banners and Chinese characters. Zhen Zhen told me that this character means "luck". A fish stands for wealth and plenty.

At midnight, there's a big fireworks display. I had to quickly tie a knot in my ears, it was so loud. Afterwards there are delicious jiaozi, which look a bit like grandma's ravioli, and all the children are given red envelopes with money inside.

A lot of people wear red clothes, too. Red is the luckiest colour here.

I found the "Forbidden City" especially fascinating. Only the emperor and his court used to be allowed inside. I saw red dragons outside the Temple of Heaven. They are as long as a bus and they did a wild dance. And imagine: suddenly one of the dragons nudged me. His name is Long and he is letting me fly around with him. He knows about a lot of other great festivals all over the world. I'll write again from the next one.

Love from Felix, always thinking about you.

After Sophie has read out the letter to the whole family, she whispers excitedly: "Just think, my Felix is travelling on one of those long luck dragons! He wouldn't even fit inside our house!" Her brother Nicholas laughs: "That's true, his back half would have to stay standing outside the front door!" "Oh yes, then he could fart," her little sister Lena shouts, and then she crows: "I'm going to dress up as a dragon at carnival time!" But Sophie doesn't hear that; she's already thinking about tomorrow, when she will show Malte the letter at school. His eyes will pop out of his head!

Picture captions:

Tiananmen Gate (gate to the Forbidden City); Temple of Heaven; Long the Dragon

It isn't long before a funny-looking troop is assembling for the Rose Monday carnival parade. Only Julius says: "Count me out! I'm too old to dress up." "What about us, then?" cry Mum and Dad. The two of them are going as a camel – and they look too funny for words. Carnival music is playing, and red and yellow bunting is hung up above the market square. The first carnival float arrives. "Helau!" Sophie and Lena shout. That's what everyone shouts at carnival time. "Helau!" Then it rains sweets. Lena starts crying because one has hit her on the head. Mum comforts her. "I've got it!" cries Nicholas, catching a bar of chocolate. They go home later very satisfied, with their bags full.

It isn't long before another letter from Felix turns up in the mailbox. But where on earth has her bunny got to now? Sophie is amazed when she reads what is written on the envelope in his scrawly handwriting.

Latest news for

My dearest Sophie

Martinistrasse 19

48143 Münster

Germany

Envelope 2:

From: Felix

In the jungle of Rio de Janeiro

That's in Brazil

February here is as warm as summer at home

Bom dia, my dearest Sophie,

That's what they say here. Long and I landed in Brazil early in the morning, and you'll never believe where! On the hand of the Christ statue that watches over the city of Rio de Janeiro from high up on a mountain. It's absolutely huge, one finger is much longer than an airbed. I have an amazing view of the city from up here, and of Sugar Loaf Mountain. That's a high mountain, right by the sea. Up here, all you can hear is the birds twittering, but it's really busy down in the city. And of course, that's where I have to go! Always following the music. Let me tell you, my paws are dancing along of their own accord. Rodrigo has shown me a strange building called the Sambodromo, which looks like this

A lot of carnival floats and Samba groups with drums pass through it. Just imagine: the Samba groups' costumes are all on a particular theme, like birds for example. Some costumes are so heavy that the dancers have to be lifted onto the float with a crane. A lot of them cost as much as a small car.

On Shrove Tuesday, the children are allowed to join in, and to stay up until midnight. But they need an official permit for that. The plans for the carnival here last almost as long as from one birthday to the next. But there are no sweets here. Did you catch a lot of sweets on Rose Monday?

Yours wonderingly,

Felix

When Sophie has read the letter, she phones Auntie Edda, because she has been to Rio, too. "The Rio carnival is world famous," Auntie Edda tells her, "and the Sambodromo is as big as a football stadium. Millions of people live in Rio, but it also has the world's largest urban forest. You shouldn't go in there alone, because the forest is so big you can easily get lost. You have to climb over fallen

trees and big rocks, and the monkeys and toucans screech all around you.” Oh, thinks Sophie, I wonder if Felix will bring a cute little monkey home with him? It could have fun climbing the curtains all day, and sleep in Lena’s doll bed at night.

Picture captions:

Sugarloaf Mountain; Christ statue; Shrove Tuesday

Sadly, sadly, Sophie’s parents won’t hear of having a monkey in the house, but they have an idea: “Make yourself a samba drum!” Sophie gets an old flower pot from the cellar. She uses a saucepan lid to draw a circle on some greaseproof paper. It’s a lot of work, because you need twelve circles for a drum! Then a piece of fabric goes into the flower pot. Dad mixes up some wallpaper paste, and Sophie sticks the greaseproof paper circles one on top of another. Finally, she ties a cord around them so that, once the paper is dry, they are stretched nice and tight.

The next day, Sophie paints her drum in bright colours. And soon, a lively samba group is parading through the house. Sophie wonders where Felix will travel to next.

When Sophie and Azra, who has moved in next door, run home from school in a hailstorm, there is a new letter from Felix lying on the dresser, with a lot of colourful stamps on it. Sophie can hardly wait to open it.

Important news, just for

Sophie

Martinistrasse 19

48143 Münster

That is in Germany

Envelope 3:

Happy Purim! שמח פורים!

From: Felix.

Currently at the seaside in Tel Aviv

Israel

March, in sunny Tel Aviv

Dear Sophie,

It’s so warm here that people are already wearing t-shirts. And just imagine: there are palm trees along the street and on the other side of them, a really long sandy beach. This evening, a lot of children and adults are walking through the streets in fancy dress. When you see girls dressed up as boys and the other way around; when you see big babies, wild animals or clowns in the street, you

know that people are celebrating Purim. I followed them and ended up at a synagogue, which is a house of God. Inside, men and women were sitting separately. Then a man came up and read something out loud from a scroll in another language. Every time he said “Haman,” everyone made a lot of noise with rattles and horns, and shouted out.

Later, Miriam explained it all to me: a long, long time ago, the evil Haman wanted to have all the Jews in Persia killed, but Queen Esther stopped him. And Jewish people celebrate it for three days. After the service in the synagogue, they give each other presents and dance.

There is food, as well: triangular Hamantaschen. Those are a kind of biscuit with a sweet filling – very tasty, let me tell you!

The next day, a colourful parade goes through the streets. Oh, I wish you could have been there.

Do you know, Miriam took me to a wishing bridge. You just stand on it, look at the sea, touch the picture of your star sign on the railing, make a wish – and then your wish comes true. I’m going to do that now.

Love and kisses from your Felix,
who is off now to the next festival.

Sophie looks up from the letter. She would have loved to celebrate Purim with Felix and Miriam in her carnival costume, and booed the evil Haman.

There should be a wishing bridge like the one in Tel Aviv here in Münster! Then Sophie has an idea. She puts a piece of chalk in her trouser pocket and rides her bike down the street, to the bridge over the river Aa. She draws a little bull on the railing for Taurus, which is her star sign. Then she puts her hands on it and says softly: “Come home, Felix.”

Then it’s the start of the Easter holidays, and Sophie’s family goes to East Frisia. They are staying on a houseboat for the first time.

“I’m sleeping here!” Sophie decides, leaping onto one of the bunks. Only Lena gazes at the water with a worried look on her face and calls out: “But where is the Easter Bunny going to hide the eggs?” Mum smiles. “Wait and see,” she says.

On Easter Monday, they walk up the Plythenberg with a lot of other families. When they reach the top of the hill, the Easter egg rolling begins. The children let the eggs roll all the way down the hill. “Hooray!” shouts Lena: her egg has rolled the furthest. Nicholas’s is the most bashed up. Sophie giggles – she will have to tell Felix about this when he gets back.

Text on signs:

Egg rolling; egg tapping

The cuddly rabbit hasn’t forgotten his Sophie, either, and when she gets back from holiday, there is a new envelope waiting for her. The scrawly writing on it says:

To my dearest Sophie

Martinistrasse 19

48143 Münster

Germany

Envelope 4:

From: Felix

Currently in the mysterious city of Petra

Jordan

In the desert – it's so hot here I wish I could take my fur off

Hello, my dearest Sophie,

Aboard my flying dragon, I spotted an ancient city in the desert, surrounded by red rocks. But no one lives there any more. Tall houses were carved out of the rocks there a long time ago. There are old canals there, too, and a theatre with stone seats.

Ali and I climbed up thousands of steps to a monastery. He and his family live not far from there. At the moment, they are observing Ramadan. That's when Muslims fast during the day, when the sun is in the sky, and only eat and drink in the morning before sunrise, and in the evening after sunset. Children don't do it until they're older. They do this for a whole month – from one new moon to the next.

Moon captions:

new moon; half moon; full moon; half moon; new moon.

Ramadan lasts 29-30 days, which is a whole month!

During the day you're not even allowed chewing gum or a sweet! And no water, either, even though it's really hot. Muslims want to think about poor people and understand how hard their lives are, Ali says.

Everyone is looking forward to Eid al Fitr, which is what they call the festival of breaking the fast at the end of the month. They celebrate for three days, Ali says, and there are a lot of sweet things – I'm looking forward to trying them all.

But... what are you doing in the school holidays, my dear Sophie? Whether you are at the riding stables, the swimming pool or at Johanna's house, I am sending you all my love.

See you soon, your Felix

"No way!" Sophie cries out once she has read the letter. "My Felix is eating as many sweets as he wants." And no wonder! Eid al Fitr means "sugar feast". Azra has told her about that, too. Her whole

family puts on new clothes for it, and has breakfast together. Azra and her sisters are especially excited because they get presents to unwrap after the meal.

Later, they go round to see their neighbours, family and friends, and they wish each other a happy Eid. They do a lot of baking in the days before. Will Sophie be allowed to join in?

“Of course!” Azra calls over the garden fence. “We’re baking Baklava now. Come over, and bring your apron!” Sophie doesn’t need asking twice. There is a lot to do in the kitchen: nuts to be ground up, syrup to be cooked, and bubbles have to be skimmed off. But the funniest part is rolling the pastry around a stick and then pushing it together like an accordion before they place the rolls on a baking tray. Azra and Sophie giggle so much that the pastry almost slips onto the floor. They just manage to catch it. There is soon a delicious smell coming from the oven, and then they all go to visit Azra’s grandparents together. To Sophie’s surprise, when Azra greets her grandpa, she kisses his hand and puts it to her forehead. Should she do that with her grandma as well?

Then it’s nearly Sophie’s and Felix’s birthday – and Felix still isn’t back. But the candles are lit on her birthday cake, and beside it is an envelope that you can see has travelled a long way.

News for

My Sophie

Martinistrasse 19

48143 Münster

Envelope 5:

From: Felix

c/o Kenta and Marina

Tokyo

Japan

Under the carp, 5 May

Happy Birthday, my dearest Sophie!

Kon’nichiwa, that’s how you say hello here. And while you’re saying it, you put your hands together and bow. Kenta and Marina told me that – they live here in Tokyo. Lit-up adverts flash on the skyscrapers and huge screens flicker. Between the tall buildings is the even taller Tree of Heaven, which is the second tallest TV tower in the world. But to get to the point: today, the whole of Japan is celebrating Children’s Day. In the morning, brightly coloured wind socks in the shape of carp are

hung up. They flutter everywhere: in the park, over the river, outside the schools and in the shops. I even saw a giant carp on a crane. Now I'm sure you're wondering what this is all about. The carp, which swims against the current, shows children that you can overcome obstacles. Parents want their children to become like carp: strong and healthy. Marina told me that. And look: Kenta told me who gets which colour of carp – isn't that lovely? There are Kashiwa mochi to eat, little rice cakes wrapped in oak leaves, and really great sweets in wrappers that look like carp.

I'm afraid I won't make it home in time for our birthday, but I am sending you a carp to make and wishing for you to grow strong and always be healthy!

Lots of love, your Felix.

Instructions:

1. Cut out the coloured square along the dotted lines, fold it into four, and then unfold it again.
2. Then fold the left-hand side into the middle
3. Turn the square over (back side facing up)
4. Fold the top and bottom sides into the middle
5. Fold the top right-hand corner into the middle along the diagonal line, then fold a small corner inwards at the bottom right.
6. Fold top and bottom into the middle
7. Fold in half lengthways and tuck in the paper on the left-hand side
- 8.
9. Turn the carp around. Finished!

Sophie puts on the birthday crown that Lena has made for her and blows out the candles. Then Mum carries her birthday cake to school. Before lunchtime, Sophie's class sings to her. And then Sophie is lifted up on her chair as many times as her age.

When her teacher hears that Felix has been to Tokyo, she says: "If you go to someone's house in Japan, you take off your shoes. You always enter a Japanese house in socks or slippers." Sophie laughs: "It's a good job Felix doesn't have any shoes – then he can't forget to take them off."

At the weekend, Sophie has a birthday sleepover. She has thought up something very special for it, and she and Mum have got out rolls of wallpaper, glitter pens and brightly-coloured sticky tape. They start as soon as the cake has been eaten: Sophie and her guests fold large carp out of squares of wallpaper, and paint them in different colours. When they have finished, Sophie cries: "Just a minute, there's one missing!" Then she makes an extra little green carp for Felix. They all hang their carp up on the washing line outside. When Kasimir the cat slinks out into the garden that night, unsuspecting, he leaps high in the air in horror.

The evenings are getting lighter now. It's the start of summer, and the postman brings a new letter for Sophie. There is a particularly pretty stamp on it, and in Felix's scrawly writing it says:

Written by firelight for:

The best Sophie in the world

Martinistrasse 19

48143 Münster

Germany

Envelope 6:

From: Felix

By a lake in Finland –

and there are more of those here than you can count

The weekend after 21 June

Hei, Sophie!

I have travelled to a lake with Aira's family, and we're celebrating Juhannus, which is what they call the longest day – or the night which isn't really a night, because it hardly gets dark.

Aira and her little brother have just raised the Finnish flag above their summer house. Then all their cousins arrived and we had dinner around a long children's table. Oh, I wish you had been here – you would have worn a garland of flowers like the other girls, and now you would be watching the big fire being lit on the cliffs. Everyone is glad that the summer is finally here. They dance and celebrate until the next morning.

Aira told me about the Juhannus magic: tonight, the big girls listen out for cuckoos calling. And if the cuckoo calls, then a girl who is in love will have to go on waiting for her future partner.

Cuckoo or no cuckoo, I am coming back to you now on my flying dragon and I am soooo looking forward to seeing you.

Your Felix

P.S. We have to go to Finland together sometime, because they have funny competitions here: welly throwing, mud football tournaments and wife-carrying.

Sophie takes the letter and runs straight outside to her brother. When Nicholas hears about the welly throwing, he grabs a mud-encrusted boot at once and flings it high into the air. But then there's a clang and the boot gets stuck in the gutter. Lena is already throwing her pink boot over the fence into Azra's garden. Before the entire contents of the shoe cupboard fly away, Mum quickly shouts: "That's enough now!"

Then the summer holidays begin, and Felix still isn't back. Sophie decides to spend the night in her treehouse. She packs a few things, climbs the rope ladder and gets really cosy up there.

But when it gets dark, and then even darker, she hears all kinds of spooky noises. A hiss comes from the bushes, and soon after, a loud lip-smacking sound. Sophie gets goose pimples. She really wants to call out for Mum and Dad – but she doesn't have to, because just then, the patio door opens. "I'd like to spend the night in the treehouse, too!" Dad calls out into the darkness. Sophie quickly lets the rope ladder down for him.

Dad climbs up, but he doesn't really fit in the treehouse. He feet stick out. "What if Felix can't find his way home?" Sophie asks.

"Don't worry," Dad says, putting his arms around her. "The name Felix means 'lucky one'. He'll be home soon." Then her father falls asleep, just like that – and starts snoring loudly! Sophie can't get a wink of sleep with all that din. And what's this? Bzzz, bzzz – now there are flies in here, too! It takes a long time for Sophie to finally fall asleep.

The next morning, Sophie is woken very early by a soft hiss. Where is that coming from? She quickly crawls to the doorway and looks out. But there isn't a car or a motorbike zooming past. Sophie listens hard. The sound is coming from above her. She looks up at the sky. "Huh?" she murmurs in surprise. At first, she can't see anything, but then a little dot appears, which quickly gets bigger. Is it a UFO? No, it's a flying dragon, with a certain cuddly, long-eared someone aboard. Sophie holds her breath as Felix and the dragon perform a loop-the-loop over the treehouse. "Here I am! Sophie calls, waving for all she is worth. "Here!"

The little bunny heads straight towards his world's best Sophie and leaps off the dragon's back into her arms. Her globe trotter is back! Sophie hugs her cuddly rabbit and sniffs his soft ears. They smell a little bit like fireworks, and something sweet, and meadow flowers. But Felix and Sophie don't tell anyone how all this happened...

And Long the Dragon? He flies off to the next festival.