

All about Mid-autumn Festival: holiday's history, how to celebrate, where to donate and recycle moon cakes in Hong Kong

- Celebrated every year on the 15th of the eighth lunar month, the festival was originally a way of thanking the moon for a good harvest and praying to it for luck.
- Nowadays, the holiday is a time for families to gather and feast on moon cakes, and you should make sure to donate your extra pastries and recycle the boxes.

Paragraph

- 1 As people ready their lanterns and moon cakes in time for Mid-autumn Festival on Saturday, let's take a look at the history, customs and symbolism of the moon festival.

What is the Mid-autumn Festival?

- 2 The Mid-autumn Festival is a traditional holiday held on the 15th day of the eighth month in the lunar calendar, which is when the Chinese believe the moon is brightest. On the Western calendar, it corresponds to mid-September every year.
Every year, Chinese families celebrate the Mid-autumn Festival by going to family gatherings, having moon cakes, making tong yuen, playing with lanterns, and gazing at the moon. It is widely celebrated in Chinese culture, and other countries, such as Japan and Korea, have similar holidays as well.

Myths of the moon

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There are many stories surrounding the Mid-autumn Festival, but the most well-known legend is about an archer Hou Yi and his wife Chang'e. Hou Yi was exceptionally skilled at archery, and when he shot down nine of the ten suns to protect people from drought and other natural disasters, he was rewarded with the elixir of immortality. However, when Peng Meng, Hou Yi's apprentice, attempted to steal the elixir, Chang'e stopped him by drinking the elixir herself. She flew to the moon and became its goddess. Hou Yi was heartbroken after learning what had happened and began a tradition of preparing a big feast in her honour on this day every year.

History of Mid-autumn Festival

- 4 More than 3,000 years ago during the Zhou dynasty (1025-221BC), ancient Chinese emperors worshipped the harvest moon in autumn. Appreciating the moon became more popular during the Tang dynasty (618-907) when the festival began to be regularly observed. People would offer food and drink to thank the bright moon for a good harvest and pray to it for luck. During the Northern Song dynasty (960-1279), the date for the Mid-autumn Festival was set as the 15th day of the eighth lunar month. It became a time for everyone to celebrate the year's harvest and pray to the moon.
- 5 It is said that at the end of the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368), exchanging moon cakes at the festival was a way for Han Chinese rebels to revolt against the Mongol rulers. According to folk tales, Mongol guards were everywhere because of fear of an uprising, and the Han could not meet in groups. The future emperor of the Ming dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang, and his adviser, Liu Bowen, put messages in moon cakes to communicate with other revolutionaries. The popularity of the Mid-autumn Festival peaked in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) and Qing dynasty (1644-1912). People celebrated it with activities, such as burning incense and watching fire dragon dances. Nowadays, while celebrating the Mid-autumn Festival has evolved with people's tastes, there are still some celebrations that have stayed the same. Folk tales depict the moon cake as an important revolutionary tool at the end of the Yuan dynasty.

How is the Mid-autumn Festival celebrated?

Eating moon cakes

- 6 Moon cakes symbolise harmony and unity. Nowadays, families and friends usually share a moon cake, served with tea or wine, on the night of the festival. There are many different types of moon cakes, ranging from traditional ones made with lotus seed paste and salted egg yolk, to modern versions, such as vegan moon cakes and ice cream moon cakes.



Playing with lanterns

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Lanterns are one of the oldest traditions of the Mid-autumn Festival. While they were lit by candles in the past, now, children like playing with battery-powered lanterns in the park. Lanterns of all shapes, sizes and colours can be found in Hong Kong's markets.

Moon gazing

- 8 Moon gazing is an important activity to bring the family together and appreciate the moon. This happens over a span of three days: we welcome the moon on the eve of the Mid-autumn Festival; we appreciate the moon on the night of the holiday; we send off the moon on the following day.

Glutinous rice balls (tong yuen)

- 9 Since the Mid-autumn Festival is an opportunity for families to gather, they usually eat a post-feast dessert called tong yuen which symbolises the tradition of families being together.



Celebrating the Mid-autumn Festival in an eco-friendly way

- 10 After separating the moon cake boxes and packaging according to their materials, you can go to Green@Community's locations across Hong Kong to recycle them. Greeners Action is partnering with different companies and groups to recycle used moon cake boxes and donate surplus moon cakes. One partner is Swire Properties – learn more about their collection points and rules here. Do you have more Mid-autumn treats than you can handle? Donate your moon cakes to groups like Feeding Hong Kong and Food Grace, which have drop-off points across the city.

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