

China's Mid-Autumn Festival: A Celebration of Family, Friends, and the Coming Harvest

The Mid-Autumn Festival is one of the most [important holidays in China](#) and is recognized and celebrated by ethnic Chinese around the world. The festival is held on the 15th day of the eighth month of the [Chinese lunisolar calendar](#) (the night of the full moon between early September and October).



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What is China's Mid-Autumn Festival?

Mid-Autumn Festival is a day for friends and family to gather together, offer thanks to the fall harvest, and pray for longevity and good fortune.

This holiday falls on the day of a full moon, making rooftops a great place to spend the evening. The Mid-Autumn Festival moon is traditionally said to be brighter and fuller than at any other time of year.



Members of the CLI family celebrate the Mid-Autumn Festival together.

The story of the Mid-Autumn Festival

Storytelling is an essential part of Chinese culture and many traditional holidays have stories and fables associated with them. Unsurprisingly, the Mid-Autumn Festival is no different. An abbreviated version of the story used to explain the origins of this important holiday goes as follows:

A very long time ago, nine blazing suns shone bright in the earth's sky. Our planet—too hot and too dry—was simply not conducive to human life.

Fortunately for the human race, a brave warrior named Houyi who was extremely skilled with a bow and arrow came into being. He was summoned by the emperor and was given a magical bow. With this bow he was able to shoot eight of the nine suns out of the sky, saving the world and all its people.

As a reward, the king gave the brave warrior a special elixir that, after drinking, would send him to the heavens for all of eternity. A beautiful ending indeed, but this brave warrior's heart belonged to one of the fairest women in all the land, Chang'e.

He chose to stay on earth with his lover but he still graciously accepting the elixir as a token of gratitude. It was not until, in a stroke of pure evil did the warrior's arch nemesis attempt to steal the elixir and drink it for himself.

As the warrior was not at home, his lover was left to protect the elixir from this wretched evil. Seeing no other choice, his lover drank the potion herself and began to float away up to the heavens. The brave warrior smote down his enemy swiftly, but was too late to grab hold of his lover as she slowly levitated to the moon.

She has been on the moon ever since and will be there until the end of time. It is with this sadness that Chinese people look at the moon on the Mid-Autumn Festival remembering all their loved ones that they are separated from throughout the year.



The Mid-Autumn Festival has its origins in the story of a mythical warrior and his beloved Chang'e.

Mid-Autumn Festival quick facts

Curious about the history and modern practice of the Mid-Autumn Festival? Read on for 中秋节 (Zhōngqiū jié) quick facts.

Origin

The holiday originated more than 3,000 years ago during the [Shang dynasty](#) but only gained widespread popularity 1,500 years later when emperors in the [Tang dynasty](#) began holding formal celebrations in their palaces.

Etymology

The English term “Mid-Autumn” directly translates from the Chinese holiday name 中秋节 (Zhōngqiū jié) which literally means “middle autumn festival.” See our article on [Chinese stroke order](#) to learn more about how Chinese characters are written.

中 秋

Moon worship

In [Chinese mythology](#), Houyi's lover Chang'e is said to be the goddess of the moon. After drinking the elixir of immortality, she will continue to live on the moon for all eternity accompanied by her faithful companion the [moon rabbit](#). During the Mid-Autumn festival, it was once customary to set up alters and burn incense to worship her.

In Chinese culture, the moon is also associated with fertility. The full moon was traditionally said to represent a pregnant woman. Thus, worshipping the moon on the night of the Mid-Autumn Festival, when it was said to be at its brightest and fullest, was a popular activity among women in ancient China.



Admiring the beauty of the moon plays a central part in Mid-Autumn festival celebrations.

Mooncakes!

The most famous food during the Mid-Autumn Festival is the [mooncake](#). Mooncakes are round cakes that are usually about the size of hockey pucks, although their size, flavor and style can differ depending on what part of China you are in.

There are almost too many flavors of mooncakes to try during the short-lived Mid-Autumn Festival. Ranging from salty and savory meat filled mooncakes to sweet nut and fruit filled mooncakes, you are bound to find a flavor that suits your pallet.



Chinese people traditionally exchange boxes of mooncakes as gifts during 中秋节 (Zhōngqiū jié).

Modern celebration

The Mid-Autumn Festival is celebrated with many cultural and regional variations. Outside of China, it is also celebrated in a variety of Asian countries including Japan and Vietnam. Generally, it is a day for friends and family to gather, eat mooncakes, and enjoy the full moon.

Many groups of ethnic Chinese also light different types of lanterns, symbols of fertility, to decorate and serve as a guide for spirits in the afterlife.



White rabbits, which represent the moon rabbit, legendary companion of Chang'e, are commonly associated with Mid-Autumn Festival.

Other names

In addition to "Mid-Autumn Festival," this important holiday is also known as:

- Moon Festival
- Harvest Moon Festival
- Mooncake Festival
- Reunion Festival
- 中秋节 (Zhōngqiū jié)