Lunar New Year

Hari Raya Puasa

National Day

Mid-Autumn Festival

Deepavali

International Migrants Day
  (Special Edition)
Singapore’s first National Day Parade (NDP) was held on 9 August 1966 at the historical Padang, after Singapore’s separation from Malaysia in 1965. The annual parades continued to take place at the Padang throughout the 1960s.¹

The theme of the first NDP was “National Pride and Confidence in the Future”. ² The parade commenced at 9am and involved a 21-gun salute and a march-past of 23,000 people, from military units to students to lion and dragon dancers.³

Despite the rain that began to fall mid-morning, spirits were not dampened, and the military units were greeted by cheering crowds as they continued marching through Chinatown towards Tanjong Pagar.⁴

Did you know...

NDPs throughout the 1960s took place in the morning and the first evening parade was held in 1973.⁵

In addition to the parade, the first National Day celebrations also included two firework displays: one at 4pm at the Padang, and the other at Fort Canning Rise at night.⁶

³ “Singapore’s first National Day celebrations.”
⁵ “National Day Parade 1966: 10 things about the inaugural parade.”
As Singapore prospered, NDPs became occasions to celebrate progress and look towards the future, incorporating land, air and sea performances. The first State Flag Flypast took place in 1970 and the 1990 NDP showcased Singapore’s defense on water for the first time.

Since 1975, NDPs have taken place at the Padang, the National Stadium, the Float @ Marina Bay and, in some years, have also been decentralized and taken place at multiple locations across Singapore.

The National Stadium in Kallang was the site of 18 NDPs between 1976 and 2006 until it closed for redevelopment. The stadium re-opened in 2014 and is the world’s largest free-standing dome. The 2016 NDP took place at the new stadium.

The Float @ Marina Bay is one of the most prominent NDP venues. It is the ‘world’s first and largest floating stage’ and has been used as an NDP venue 10 times since 2007.

Look out for our U.n.I Bites in 2022, where we cover other aspects of Singapore’s National Day.
HARI RAYA PUASA: FOOD AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

A compilation by the Inclusion & Integration Unit, Student Affairs Office

Hari Raya Puasa, also known as Hari Raya Aidilfitri or the festival of Eid, is celebrated at the end of Ramadan. In Malay, Hari Raya means ‘big (or grand) day of rejoicing’, while Puasa means ‘fasting’. The festival is celebrated with a variety of dishes and treats.

Beef rendang is a stew cooked with spices and coconut milk. The meat is tender and soft and has complex flavours from the spices used in the cooking process.

Rendang is a celebratory dish loved throughout Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia and is often served during festive occasions such as weddings.

Did you know...

Rendang derives its name from the Indonesian term merandang or randang, which means ‘slowly’. The longer the cooking time, the tastier it is as the liquid thickens into a gravy.

The cooking process requires patience, wisdom, and persistence. The choice of spices and method require wisdom while patience and persistence are needed during the long cooking process.

Putu Piring are circular steamed rice cakes cooked in moulds with gula melaka (palm sugar) and covered with freshly grated coconut. In addition to being a breakfast food, it is also eaten during festivities such as Hari Raya Puasa.

Sayur lodeh is a dish of vegetables (such as cabbage, carrots and long beans) cooked in coconut milk. Sayur means ‘vegetables’ in Malay, while lodeh indicates that the ingredients are cooked until soft. In Singapore and Malaysia, the dish is often cooked with prawn stock, belacan (prawn paste) and hae bee (dried shrimp) which can be skipped when preparing vegetarian versions.

Look out for our U.n.I Bites in 2022, where we cover other aspects of Hari Raya Puasa in Singapore.

10 Tan, Bonny. “Putu Piring.”
13 Tan, Bonny. “Lontong.”
14 Tan, Bonny. “Lontong.”
LUNAR NEW YEAR: NEW YEAR FOODS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

A compilation by the Inclusion & Integration Unit, Student Affairs Office

Steamboat, also known as hotpot, is often enjoyed on Lunar New Year’s Eve. Raw ingredients such as beef, vegetables, meatballs, fish and tofu are cooked in a hotpot full of flavoured soup as family members come together for their reunion dinner.¹

Fat choi (发菜), or ‘hair vegetable’ in Cantonese, is a sea moss² that derives its name from its likeness to hair. Its popularity during Lunar New Year is due to its homophone fat choy (发财), which is part of the Cantonese new year greeting ‘gung hei fat choy’ to wish others good fortune.³

Seeds and Nuts are often served as snacks during Lunar New Year.

Melon Seeds, known as guazi (瓜子) in Mandarin, symbolize fertility as the character Zi (子) means ‘child’. Lotus seeds are similarly considered auspicious as the term in Mandarin (lianzi) means ‘many sons’.⁴

Peanuts are huasheng (花生) or ‘flower of life’ in Mandarin. They are also known as ‘longevity nuts’ (长生果) and are thought to symbolise a long life⁵.

⁵ Tan, Bonny and Gao, Vicky. “Chinese New Year delicacies.”
Bak kwa (also known as rougan in Mandarin) is a salty, sweet, dried meat similar to jerky and commonly made of pork. It is believed to have originated from ancient Chinese meat preservation and preparation techniques. Bak kwa is regarded as an important part of the Lunar New Year celebrations in Singapore and is usually offered to guests during visits or as gifts to relatives and friends. As the new year approaches, long queues are often seen at popular bak kwa outlets.

Pineapple tarts, rich biscuits with pineapple jam, are loved for their sweetness and because ‘pineapple’ (ong lai) means ‘fortune come’ in Hokkien. Pineapple tarts are popular gifts during Lunar New Year as they are believed to bring luck and prosperity for the coming year.

Yusheng, a salad with thin strips of raw fish and a variety of vegetables and sauces, is often served during Lunar New Year. Yu is the homophone for ‘fish’ and ‘rich’, while sheng means ‘raw’ and ‘life’.

The ritual of enjoying yusheng often begins with family members coming together at the table to toss the ingredients while voicing auspicious words and phrases.

The two common types of yusheng consumed in Singapore are Cantonese yusheng and Teochew yusheng.

Look out for our U.n.I Bites in 2022, where we cover Lunar New Year celebrations across the region.

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6 Makansutra Singapore: The frank & no frills guide to street food & restaurants in Singapore. [Singapore: Makansutra (S) Pte Ltd. 2012], p. 41.
International Migrants Day

December 18th is International Migrants Day, a day to recognise the role and contributions of migrants around the world. The opportunities and challenges of migration are multifaceted and are linked to the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which pledge to ‘leave no one behind’.

While there is no universally accepted definition of ‘migrant’, the term is used by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to reflect “a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons”.

Did you know...

There were approximately 272 million migrants around the world in 2019, including those moving for work opportunities or to study overseas.

Migrant Workers in Singapore

In Singapore, the term ‘migrant’ often signifies ‘migrant workers’ on Work Permits. Work Permit holders include domestic workers, as well as those working in the construction, marine shipyard and process (CMP) sectors who make significant contributions to the development and maintenance of Singapore’s infrastructure.

The Impact of COVID-19

Migrant workers, particularly those in the CMP sectors living in large dormitories, have been thrust into the spotlight during the COVID-19 pandemic. While daily reports focused on the infection rates within the dormitories, individual stories serve as a reminder that each worker is more than just a number – an individual with their own history, experiences, hopes and dreams.

Learn about the lives of migrant workers in Singapore through the work of NTU students enrolled in Go-Far (Going Overseas for Advanced Reporting), a journalism module of the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information.

https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/students-go-far-with-migrant-workers

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Supporting Migrant Workers

The Migrant Workers’ Centre (MWC) functions as a non-governmental organisation whose mission is to champion fair employment practices and the well-being of migrant workers in Singapore.

We spoke with Vignesh, a migrant worker and a MWC Volunteer Ambassador. Vignesh joined MWC’s efforts to support migrant workers during the pandemic by making phone calls to fellow workers in quarantine to check on their wellbeing.

- **What do you miss most about home?**
  I miss my family in India as I haven’t been home in 4 years. My parents are farmers and I have a brother and a sister. I usually call them once a week on Sundays, but I called them every day during the Circuit Breaker.

- **What do you do to relax after work?**
  I relax in my room or spend time with friends, talking and sharing stories. We also discuss topics related to work such as incoming materials, to prepare for the following day.

- **What is your favourite place in Singapore?**
  Little India because it reminds me of home, with groups of friends meeting on Sundays to eat together [before COVID-19].

- **What are your future plans?**
  When I return to India, I plan to open my own electrical shop providing replacements and mechanical repair services. I have experience in this area, so I hope to use my skills and start my own business.

How can we support MWC’s efforts?

We are gathering messages as One NTU, for MWC to share with their network of migrant workers. **Click to submit a message of support** for the migrant worker community.

Find out how NTU students are embarking on initiatives to engage and support migrant workers!

**RESEARCH**

Through her internship with Soap Cycling, Janice (Year 4, Environmental Earth Systems Science) published a report on migrant workers’ access to soap and sanitation facilities. **Read the report here.**

**INTERNSHIP**

Wai Yan (Year 4, Psychology) is a Casework and Social Service Intern at HealthServe, addressing the complex needs of migrant workers. As a second-generation Singaporean, Wai Yan hopes to be a bridge between migrant and local communities.

**EDUCATE/ADVOCATE**

In addition to interacting with migrant workers through weekly online sessions, the NTU United Nations Students Association - Humanitarian Wing organised a talk to raise awareness of the domestic worker community. Read their posts on the implications of negative stereotypes and the impacts of COVID-19.

**VOLUNTEER**

A team of NTU International Students conducted online English lessons for migrant workers from June to July through the MAD WISH tutoring programme.
Thanksgiving prayers and pujas
Deepavali, also known as the ‘Festival of Lights’, is celebrated in Singapore and around the world. For many Hindu families, performing prayers and pujas (prayer rituals) before the deity Lakshmi is an important part of the celebrations. As the goddess of prosperity, fertility and good fortune, farming families traditionally gave thanks for the harvest, while merchants sought blessings for the financial year ahead. The morning of Deepavali involves thanksgiving prayers and pujas conducted at the family shrine, where young family members receive blessings from their elders.

Visiting temples, family and friends
After performing prayers and pujas at home, families visit the temple to join communal offerings and prayers. Temple prayers are led by a priest and food is often provided. At dusk, family and friends gather and light diya (oil lamps) to brighten windows and doorways.

Did you know…
Lighting oil lamps (diya) is a traditional activity that gives the ‘Festival of Lights’ its name.

In South India, it is believed the demon king Naraka, who is likened to darkness, was defeated by Lord Krishna to bring brightness to people’s lives. In Northern India, firecrackers and oil lamps celebrate Lord Rama of Ayuthya’s victory against demon Ravana. Lights displayed during Deepavali celebrate these mythical victories and signify that only light can counter darkness.

At night, when it is time to visit and welcome family and friends, oil lamps are lit to invite fortune and the goddess Lakshmi into people’s homes.

**Rangoli** is a form of floor design used to decorate doorways and welcome deities during Deepavali.\(^9\)

Colourful patterns are created on the ground using rice, flour, flower petals, powder or coloured sand to symbolise prosperity and prevent evil from entering the household.\(^10\) The bright and intricate rangoli designs make use of symmetry and continuous lines as any gaps or break in the patterns are believed to allow evil spirits to enter.\(^11\)

The decorative patterns play an important role in welcoming guests during the festive season\(^12\) and the designs are traditionally passed down from each generation, often by female family members.\(^13\)

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**Did you know...**

Did you know...\(^9\)

**Taking an oil bath very early in the morning** is a traditional practice by many Hindus during Deepavali. Three drops of oil are placed on the forehead before the morning bath, and the ritual is believed to be as significant as taking a bath in India’s sacred Ganges river.\(^14\)

**Rangoli designs are also an act of charity** and are traditionally made of edible items to feed insects and birds.\(^15\) A new rangoli design may therefore be redrawn daily during the festive season to keep the patterns bright and prominent.\(^16\)

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Look out for our U.n.I Bites in 2021, where we cover the types of food that are part of the Deepavali celebrations.

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Festival Treats are an important part of any festival celebration and are often only available during the festival season. As a widely celebrated occasion in Singapore and around the world, the Mid-Autumn Festival is famous for a variety of sweet and savoury treats.

Mooncakes are the most essential delicacy of the Mid-Autumn celebration. Eating mooncakes is often a way to celebrate a reunion or, if family members are physically separated, to acknowledge and think of loved ones.

Traditionally, mooncakes were made as offerings to the moon or shared within the family. Today, mooncakes are commercially produced and are commonly purchased as gifts for friends and family members.¹

In addition to the mooncake, the pomelo is traditionally associated with the Mid-Autumn Festival, as the fruit becomes ripe during the festival season. Notably, the Chinese pronunciation of the pomelo, youzi (柚子) is the homophone for “protecting the children”. Similar to the mooncake, the pomelo evokes a sense of union and wholesomeness, and has therefore become part of the festivities.²

A third type of food commonly associated with the festival is the hairy crab. Like the pomelo, it is in season and most flavorful during the Mid-Autumn celebrations and families often come together to sit around a table as they chat and enjoy the cooked crabs.³

Did you know...

Mooncakes There are a variety of types of mooncakes, ranging from Beijing to Hong Kong and Taiwanese styles; from sweet to salty and spicy tastes; from nuts to meat fillings; from tender to crispy textures.

Cantonese Style mooncakes are the most notable and widespread. Originating from Guangdong and Guangxi province, they are now available across the globe and are characterised by a rich filling and thin crust. The crust is oily, giving it a smooth and soft texture. The filling is often represented by the premium white lotus seed paste, which is sweet and has a silky texture.

Hokkien Style mooncakes are known as “Scholar Cakes”, as they are often eaten by exam candidates before exams. The filling usually contains winter melon, tangerine peel, and melon seeds, and can sometimes contain minced-meat fillings.

Teochew Style mooncakes are often differentiated by a flaky crust. La bia is a type of Teochew mooncake, which uses pork oil to cook the skin and fillings. Another type is la gao, a steamed black sesame cake.⁴

Mooncakes and Tea

During the Mid-Autumn Festival, mooncakes are traditionally served with tea. As mooncakes are sweet and greasy, tea can help reduce the greasiness and aid digestion.

The Mid-Autumn Festival is also believed to have started during the Song Dynasty, an era when tea was flourishing.

Variations of Tea

Various types of tea can be paired with different varieties of mooncake. Pu’er tea is often enjoyed with mooncakes containing nuts or meat, as Pu’er tea is refreshing but has a flavour strong enough to match the heavy filling.

Oolong tea is considered an optimal choice for sweet or salty mooncakes, as the taste is gentler compared to Pu’er tea. It is smoother and does not overpower the flavour of the mooncake.

Mooncakes which are sweet, such as those with red bean, are often accompanied by a lighter white tea to balance the sweetness of the filling.

Did you know…

Most types of tea, including black tea, green tea, white tea and oolong tea, are all derived from the same plant known as the camellia sinesis. The way the leaves are picked and processed produces the different variations of tea.

The process of producing just one pound of tea (just under 0.5kg), requires approximately 2000 tea leaves.

Look out for our U.n.I Bites in 2021, where we cover ‘About Being Together’ as part of the Mid-Autumn Festival Celebrations.

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