Lunar New Year
Hari Raya Puasa
National Day
Mid-Autumn Festival
Deepavali
International Migrants Day (Special Edition)
Deepavali, or Diwali, is an important festival in the Indian subcontinent and is also widely celebrated in Singapore. Known as the ‘Festival of Lights’, Deepavali celebrates the victory of good over evil and is marked by beautiful lights and illuminations, as well as colourful decorations. Food is also a key focus, with a delicious array of food shared among friends and family.

Adhirasam is a deep-fried pastry, similar to a donut and made of rice flour. It also contains jaggery, a natural sweetener made of sugarcane, palm or coconut. Spices such as nutmeg and cardamom powder may be added before it is shaped into discs and fried.

Kheer is another classic delicacy for Deepavali. This is a sweet creamy rice pudding, with cardamom and almonds.

Gulab jamun are dough balls kneaded with powdered milk and butter and deep-fried until golden brown. They are then soaked in a syrup made of sugar, water and saffron.
Murukku are a staple for Deepavali and considered more than just a simple snack. As the saying goes, "if there is no murukku, there is no Deepavali". For some families, making murukku at home is an important part of passing down a time-honoured tradition to the younger generation. The savoury and crunchy murukku continues to be loved by many across Singapore.

Samosas are delicious small triangular pastries filled with potatoes, peas, and spices such as fennel seeds, cumin seeds, coriander powder and garam masala. Ingredients and spices differ by region, but samosas are usually eaten hot with chutney.

Do you know...

Abstinence from Meat
During Deepavali, some non-vegetarian Hindus will abstain from meat. Some adhere to a vegetarian diet on the day of Deepavali while others may abstain from meat for a longer period. Regardless of the duration, consuming vegetarian food is a common practice for many who celebrate Deepavali.

Look out for our U.n.I Bites in 2022, where we cover the differences in Deepavali celebrations across regions.

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13 Amrita Thakkar. “10 Diwali Foods to Try Under the Lights This Year”.


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

The Mid-Autumn Festival, also known as the Mooncake Festival\(^1\), originally signified the end of the season’s harvest\(^2\). While today’s celebrations may no longer mark the autumn harvest, the festival continues to be a special time marked by the gathering of family and friends.

Celebrated on the 15\(^{th}\) day of the eighth month of the lunar calendar, the moon is thought to be at its fullest and brightest during this time of year.\(^3\) Families and friends meet to enjoy the moon, often with brightly coloured lanterns traditionally made of thin paper\(^4\).

Those unable to travel home would recite verses and poetry to express feelings of longing for relatives in their hometowns.

Do you know…

The moon is believed to symbolise reunion, and the Mid-Autumn Festival is also known as the ‘Reunion festival’.\(^5\)

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The Mid-Autumn Festival is also believed to be a special time for couples. Amongst the many legends associated with the festival, a well-known tale is that of Chang E, a queen who drank an ‘elixir of life’ to prevent the potion from falling into the wrong hands. Upon drinking the elixir, Chang E rose to the moon as the Moon Goddess.7

Traditionally, the Mid-Autumn Festival is thought to be a favourable date for weddings as the Moon Goddess is said to ensure a happy marriage.8

Others may pray to Yue Lao (月老), ‘the old man under the moon’, a deity of marriage.9 Tying a red string around Yue Lao is believed to increase one’s likelihood of ‘tying the knot’.10 Yue Lao is thought to tie the red string between couples who are destined to be together.11

Do you know...

A mural in Singapore’s Chinatown by local artist Yip Yew Chong12 depicts a nostalgic scene from the Mid-Autumn Festival, including images of mooncakes and lanterns.

In addition to savouring mooncakes and lighting lanterns, some of the traditional activities enjoyed with family and friends during the Mid-Autumn Festival include ‘moon viewing’ (shangyue) moonlit walks, and performances such as Chinese dance, Chinese opera and puppetry.13

Look out for our U.n.I Bites in 2022, where we cover Mid-Autumn Festival celebrations in Singapore & the region.

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

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

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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 Fly-past 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.l Bites in 2022, where we cover other aspects of Singapore’s National Day.

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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.

Spices - Photo Credit: Ariyani Tedjo / Shutterstock

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.

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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.

Ondeh Ondeh, also known as klepon in Indonesia, are glutinous rice balls with palm sugar filing coated with grated coconut. The dough is made from glutinous rice flour and pandan leaves which give the dough its green colour.

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

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10 Tan, Bonny. “Putu Piring.”
13 Tan, Bonny. “Lontong.”
14 Tan, Bonny. “Lontong.”
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, symbolise 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 life.⁵

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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.

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.

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.