U.n.I Bites
A compilation by the Inclusion & Integration Unit

Lunar New Year
Hari Raya Puasa
National Day
Mid-Autumn Festival
Deepavali

International Migrants Day
(Special Edition)
HARI RAYA PUASA: HARI RAYA IN SINGAPORE

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

Hari Raya Puasa, also known as Hari Raya Aidilfitri or Eid-Al-Fitr, marks the end of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan.¹ In the lead-up to Hari Raya Puasa, light-ups and bazaars around Geylang Serai and Kampong Gelam are part of Singapore’s annual calendar of festivities.²

The bazaars traditionally include rows of stalls selling clothes, gifts, accessories and a variety of food such as beef rendang (beef stew cooked with spices), ketupat (rice cakes wrapped in coconut leaves) and kueh (traditional desserts).³ In 2022, lights and arches can be found along roads such as Changi Road, Geylang Road and Sims Avenue, displaying festive decorations and symbols such as floral designs and oil lamps.⁴

In Singapore, various festive symbols mark the Hari Raya Puasa celebrations:

- **Ketupat** (rice cake wrapped with coconut leaves) are a key part of celebrations and weaving the coconut leaves was a common family activity. Today, it is less common for families to weave ketupat at home due to the skill and mastery required.⁵

- **Green packets** containing money, or duit raya, are given by working adults to children and elderly people as a gift.⁶

- **Oil lamps** were once homemade and lit as part of the festivities but today, families more commonly use modern decorative lights to light up their homes.⁷

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Hari Raya Puasa falls on the first day of the 10th month of the Islamic calendar.\(^8\) It is not a fixed date and varies each year. This results in Hari Raya Puasa occasionally coinciding with other major cultural holidays in Singapore and gives rise to a unique tradition.

**Kongsi Raya**, also known as Gongxi Raya, combines the term kongsì (which means ‘share’ in Malay but also sounds similar to gongxi - the Lunar New Year greeting in Mandarin meaning ‘congratulations’) and raya (the Malay word for ‘celebration’).\(^9\) The term was coined when Hari Raya Puasa and Lunar New Year coincided in the same week from 1996 to 1998.\(^10\) As the two celebrations only meet every 33 years, Kongsi Raya will only occur again in 2029.\(^11\)

Deepavali, also known as Diwali or the ‘Festival of Lights’, celebrates the victory of good over evil.\(^12\)

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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.\(^4\)

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.I Bites in 2022, where we cover other aspects of Singapore’s National Day.

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

The Mid-Autumn Festival, also known as the Mooncake Festival, originally signified the end of the season’s harvest. 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 15th 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. Families and friends meet to enjoy the moon, often with brightly coloured lanterns traditionally made of thin paper.

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’.

The round shape of the ubiquitous mooncakes enjoyed during the Mid-Autumn Festival are thought to signify the full moon and unity within the family.

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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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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.

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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.

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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

Nations such as Singapore are founded on the migration of people and the converging of cultures, traditions, and ways of life. As we approach International Migrants Day 2021, we explore three familiar locations in Singapore, and how the migration of people has played a key role in making Singapore the vibrant city-state it is today.

Singapore was set up as a free port in the early 19th century. As the port flourished, Singapore’s population grew exponentially, with different migrant communities arriving to make Singapore their home.

In an attempt to enforce order, the British implemented the ‘Raffles Town Plan’, creating separate ‘enclaves’ for the various migrant communities, such as the Europeans, Chinese, Indians, Arabs and Bugis. Under the plan, present-day Chinatown was allocated to the Chinese community, and the Malay, Arab and Bugis communities were assigned Kampong Gelam. The Indian community eventually moved to a point north of the river to an area now known as Little India.

Do you know...

Although on paper, these communities were segregated to live in separate areas, these divides were not fully observed. This is evident, for example, in the construction of various places of worship in a single area – Singapore has the only Chinatown in the world with a Buddhist temple, mosque and Hindu temple all on the same street.

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The area now known as Little India was mostly home to Europeans in the 1840s as the racecourse built in the area served as their social gathering point. Over time, the area became known for cattle trading conducted by Indian migrant workers, eventually resulting in a congregation of various goods and services for the growing Indian community.

Historically an area designated to the Muslim community, the street names around Kampong Gelam (also known as Kampong Glam) reflect areas within the Muslim world such as ‘Kandahar Street’ and ‘Muscat Street’. Various Muslim migrant communities in turn established their own smaller ‘kampongs’ (or ‘villages’ in Malay) within the area, such as Kampong Bugis, Kampong Java and Kampong Malacca.

Chinatown grew rapidly from the mid-19th century with an increase in residential and trade activity. It was originally subdivided by the various Chinese migrant communities, each belonging to a province or dialect group. Each major group such as the Cantonese, Hokkien and Teochew communities had their own streets and centres of activity.

Although these areas continue to be associated with their designated communities, today they exist as vibrant neighbourhoods enjoyed by all; a reminder that present-day Singapore is founded on the migration of people and the converging of cultures.

Look out for our U.n.i Bites in 2022, where we cover other topics related to International Migrants Day.

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LUNAR NEW YEAR CELEBRATIONS & DIFFERENCES ACROSS THE REGION

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

Lunar New Year, also referred to as the Spring Festival, is an important celebration across the region and is known as ‘Chunjie’ in China, ‘Tet’ in Vietnam, ‘Seollal’ or ‘Seol-nal’ in Korea, and ‘Losar’ in Tibet. The season is commonly marked by spring cleaning, joyous family celebrations, and religious and ancestral ceremonies. While many similarities exist across the region, there are also differences in the way the festive season is celebrated.

In Singapore, the River Hongbao has been an iconic Lunar New Year event since 1987. The display includes cultural elements such as giant lanterns and performances and was held at Gardens by the Bay for the first time in 2021.

In China, firecrackers were traditionally aimed at keeping evil spirits away. Called baozhu or ‘bamboo explosions’ in Mandarin, firecrackers were originally made of bamboo stems. Eventually, firecrackers grew to be associated with festive occasions and became a key component of Lunar New Year celebrations. According to legend, a frightful monster known as Nian (which means ‘year’ in Mandarin) could be kept away with the sounds and fire of the baozhu.

2 Encyclopaedia Britannica. “Lunar New Year.”
4 National Heritage Board. “Yusheng and Lo Hei.”
7 Vasu, Suchittra. “Firecrackers.”
The origins of the lion dance date back more than 1500 years, and the lion costume is believed to have been designed by villagers to help drive away the beast Nian on the eve of Lunar New Year. The performances are typically accompanied by drums, cymbals and gongs and are thought to bring good fortune.

In Vietnam, the dance is also referred to as a ‘unicorn dance’. With the ‘body of an antelope, the feet of a horse and the tail of a buffalo’, the unicorn is a symbol of ‘intelligence and goodness’ and is believed to bring ‘peace, happiness and prosperity’.

In Korea, charye is a tea offering ceremony held at the start of the lunar calendar to honour one’s ancestors. Although there are regional differences in the way the ceremony is conducted, it commonly involves a charye table with an array of food and drink including rice cake soup, fruit, tea or alcohol. After the tea offering ceremony, families also visit their ancestors’ graves to pay their respects.

Look out for our U.n.I Bites in 2023, where we cover other aspects of Lunar New Year.