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Mid-Autumn Festival for homesick Hong Kong migrants to UK – the mooncakes they'll eat and the festivities local Chinese communities put on

For some who have moved from Hong Kong to Britain, it hasn't been the smoothest of transitions, and this year's Mid-Autumn Festival will feel acutely different. Nevertheless, Asian businesses are baking mooncakes and desserts that will remind Hongkongers of home, and Chinese communities in Britain are putting on festivities.

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A handful of Asian businesses in London, like in Chinatown (pictured), are seeking to mark the Mid-Autumn Festival for those homesick for Hong Kong. Photo: Getty Images

In Hong Kong, the Mid-Autumn Festival is traditionally a calendar highlight. Every September (health pandemics permitting), the city's streets and parks come alive with stirring dragon and lion dances, slick kung fu demonstrations and spectacular lantern displays, making for an awe-inspiring sight.

For Simon Cheng Man-kit, it is a beloved occasion associated with many fond memories. When he was a child, his family would prepare paper lanterns and red candles, [boxes of mooncakes](#), and an assortment of snacks and fruits, and head to Tuen Mun Park, which was close to his home in the New Territories, for the evening.

They would carefully light their lanterns and hang them on a tree before rolling out a picnic blanket and settling down to chat, play board games and mingle with other families.

"It's a scene that I will never forget. The many lanterns in the park seemed like stars on Earth, sparkling and twinkling. And it was enjoyable to see other people smiling, talking and laughing, and children running around the park," [Cheng](#) recalls. "I could feel a sense of freedom and solidarity, as everyone was in a good mood. There was such a strong tie between me and the community I once lived in."



Simon Cheng Man-kit is a 30-year-old activist and former British consulate employee. Photo: Simon Cheng Man-kit

However, the festival will take on a distinctively different flavour this year for the 30-year-old. The activist and former British consulate employee will be celebrating Mid-Autumn halfway across the world, in London, [where he now lives after being granted political asylum in 2020.](#)

Instead of spending quality time with his family, who still live in Hong Kong, he says he will probably buy some mooncakes to enjoy with his girlfriend and attend gatherings with other Hongkongers who have recently moved to the British capital. He might visit East Asian or Southeast Asian community centres, if any are hosting themed events.

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“The vibe of the Mid-Autumn Festival in Hong Kong is incomparable, as everyone is on the same page and [rooted in] the same culture. Even when I was studying in Taiwan and mainland China, I didn’t see such [celebratory] scenes,” he notes. “In London, even though the city is diverse, the festival is still a fringe event, only for specific ethnic Chinese groups.”

For many of the thousands of Hongkongers who have uprooted their lives and moved far away from home, it hasn’t been the smoothest of transitions.

Migrants have often struggled to acclimatise to life in Britain, be it because of the frustrations of job hunting or the weather, and the fact Mid-Autumn Festival celebrations are more muted in the country – even among local Chinese communities – only serves to underscore the cultural differences.



Two Chinese workmen work as a team attaching paper lanterns to a shop in London's Chinatown. Photo: Getty Images

Another recent transplant from Hong Kong, who wishes to be known only as Miss Chan, is one of those acutely feeling the difference.

“Back home in Hong Kong, I usually celebrated the Mid-Autumn Festival by having dinner – sometimes a barbecue – with family, relatives and friends,” says the 40-year-old, who moved to London last year and works in mass media. “I’m missing them a lot this year ... after all, the purpose of the festival is to come together with loved ones and have a reunion. It’s not about the place or how the festival is celebrated, but more about the people surrounding you.”

Although she has yet to make any concrete plans for the upcoming festival, she says she will probably find time to hold a virtual meet-up with family members still living in Hong Kong.



People play with lanterns at the Mid-Autumn Lantern Carnival in Victoria Park in Causeway Bay in 2008. Photo: SCMP

Of course, not every Hongkonger in London feels strongly about the festival. “I am not planning to celebrate here in Britain this year, and I didn’t do so last year,” says 31-year-old Lydia Chu, a project manager who moved to London with her husband in 2019. “I don’t miss the festival that much – after all, I’ve never liked mooncakes!

“When I was in Hong Kong, I did go out to play with lanterns with my friends and hang out at the park. But now that I’m here, I just don’t have friends around to do the same, and I’m not desperate to find people just to recreate that experience.”

Nevertheless, members of the Hong Kong diaspora in London still have some festive cheer to look forward to, thanks to a handful of local Asian businesses seeking to mark the occasion.



London’s Chinatown celebrates the Mid-Autumn Festival in 2017. Photo: Getty Images

The London Chinese Community Centre kicked off festivities on September 1, when it held a tai chi demonstration in the city’s Chinatown as a pre-festival celebration. And the Pavilion Gallery, which runs community events themed around major Chinese festivals, was, at the time of writing, planning to conduct a family-friendly lantern-making workshop on September 11.

Outside the capital, in Liverpool, the World Museum is planning to celebrate the festival on September 25 with traditional craft demonstrations and dance performances courtesy of the Liverpool Confucius Institute. In Britain's second city, the Chinese Community Centre – Birmingham is selling mooncakes and festive dishes such as steamed duck with taro in fermented bean curd to raise funds that will go towards supporting members of the community.

Back in London, several bakeries have been putting their imaginations into the preparation of mooncakes, while a few restaurants and eateries will be adding themed items to their menus.



Golden Gate Cake Shop has created classic lotus seed mooncakes, as well as an assortment of mini mooncakes.

Photo: Golden Gate Cake Shop

In Chinatown, Japanese patisserie Sakurado has unveiled baked matcha mooncakes and snow skin red bean mooncakes, which have been flying off the shelves. “I’ve already had many requests for the mooncakes from Hongkongers in particular, through [Instagram](#) and WhatsApp,” says owner Mei Rubin. “In fact, I’ve even had customers based in Hong Kong order the mooncakes for their friends here in Britain.”

Fellow Chinatown bakery Golden Gate Cake Shop has created classic lotus seed mooncakes, as well as an assortment of mini mooncakes in flavours such as pandan, [durian](#), salted egg custard and even Iberico ham with truffle and mixed nuts. According to owner Michael Wong, “Business has been busier than last year, and I think that’s because everyone is coming out to shop and eat after lockdowns.

“It looks good at the moment,” he says.



In honour of the Mid-Autumn Festival, Bubblewrap Waffle in London will be offering a limited-edition creation – waffles topped with matcha gelato, adzuki beans, strawberries and a bunny-shaped piece of panna cotta. Photo: Bubblewrap Waffle

Andre Wibowo, of Bubblewrap Waffle, has also noticed increased footfall in Chinatown in recent months as a result of loosened Covid-19 restrictions. In honour of the Mid-Autumn Festival, his shop, which specialises in Hong Kong-style *gai daan jai* (egg waffles), will be offering a limited-edition creation – waffles topped with matcha gelato, adzuki beans, strawberries and a bunny-shaped piece of panna cotta. These will be available for just a week, starting on September 20.

A few streets away, Taiyakiya is purveying *taiyaki* (fish-shaped waffles) filled with white lotus paste – a tribute to “the most popular and traditional filling for mooncakes”, says owner Emily Foo.

Elsewhere in the city, Asian restaurant Mei Ume, at the Four Seasons Hotel London at Ten Trinity Square, has launched a Mid-Autumn menu featuring dishes such as crabmeat dumplings, Peking duck – and, of course, mooncakes, of the snow skin variety, for dessert.



Mei Ume, at the Four Seasons Hotel London at Ten Trinity Square, has launched a Mid-Autumn Festival menu featuring snow skin mooncakes. Photo: Mei Ume

Chinese supermarkets are getting in on the celebrations, too: Tian Tian Market, which has three outlets across the city – in Aldgate, the Isle of Dogs and, as of this month, Russell Square (a Canary Wharf branch is planned for later this year, too) – is selling lava custard mooncakes and mini snow skin mooncakes. In a limited edition of just 400 boxes, the chain is offering white lotus seed paste two-yolk mooncakes.

For those missing the festivities in Hong Kong, these toothsome treats will hopefully offer a little taste of home.