



Moonstruck

The best way to get a taste of the Chinese Mid-Autumn Festival, set to kick off mid-month, is to sink your teeth into a mooncake

WORDS NICOLE BITTAR

Imagine a humble cake inciting a full-scale revolution. In one of the many fables surrounding the origins of the mooncake, this is precisely how the Ming revolutionaries thwarted Mongolian rulers at the end of China's Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). A lotus syrup or bean paste-filled cake was distributed to the Han

Chinese with a secret message hidden inside, directing the people to revolt on the 15th day of the eighth lunar month.

In a less dramatic yet far older legend, the mooncake began as an offering for the immortal Moon Goddess Chang'e.

Although Chinese folklore around the origin of mooncakes is as varied as the fillings themselves, one thing is certain: the

mooncake is an intrinsic part of Mid-Autumn Festival celebrations enjoyed to this day.

Modern mooncakes

If the mooncake's mythology is a mouthful, wait until you sink your teeth into one of these filling sweets. Whether sweet or savoury (both are equally moreish), mooncakes hold an important place in Asian

culture, particularly in Hong Kong, mainland China and Singapore, where they are integral to Mid-Autumn Festival celebrations.

Like Lunar New Year, the Mid-Autumn Festival falls on a different date every year depending on the moon (15 September this year). People travel home to visit their families, and it is very much the season to give



fine diners and upmarket hotels. Mooncakes can be purchased year-round, but production and demand peaks around September, as does the price tag, which varies wildly from a few Hong Kong dollars to several hundred.

The list of mooncake fillings available today is as long as your arm. When in Hong Kong, try Iberico & Co's ham and mixed nut mooncake or, for sweet-tooths, Yan Toh Heen's custard cream and gold dust mooncakes are a hit. Dynasty Restaurant's pandan (Indonesian leaves used in sweet and savoury cooking that taste similar to coconut) and salted egg yolk are a popular choice, as is the seaweed sugar lotus at Fook Lam Moon. Royal Garden has mooncakes to suit both sweet and savoury tastes – red bean paste with dried tangerine peel anyone? Snow skin mooncakes (not baked or glazed) have also gained popularity, especially with the younger set. ✈

thanks, host colourful gatherings and enjoy festive spreads. The mooncake – the speciality food of this festival – fittingly symbolises unity, reunion and family.

Where to get a mooncake fix

Mooncakes are available practically everywhere, from street stalls, supermarkets, food courts and bakeries, to

Where to eat mooncakes in Hong Kong

THE PENINSULA

Luxe ascends a new level in mooncake offerings at The Peninsula. Last year's egg custard mooncakes came complete with LED lantern packaging, great for extra glam on festival night. Expect to pay upwards of HK\$485 (A\$82) for eight. **Salisbury Road, Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon** hongkong.peninsula.com

PIERRE HERME PARIS

A petit slice of France is available at Pierre Herme outlets throughout Hong Kong. At festival time, expect pastry perfection in this year's giftbox of four chocolate mooncakes, including the Mathilda (almond praline with lemon zest, slivered almonds, encased in dark chocolate). A box of four costs HK\$340 (A\$58), personalised logo optional.

Harbour City – Gateway Arcade, Shop 2410, level 2, Kowloon pierreherme.com/hk

DASHIJIE

Honing her baking skills has earned food critic and chef, Dashijie, a reputation for excellence. Multiple distribution points throughout Hong Kong Island and Kowloon prove her prowess and demand for mooncake magic. Try the yellow lotus seed with double egg yolk. The paste is not overly sweet with a non-oily yolk and optimum cake thickness and texture. For prices, stockists and to buy online, visit dashijie.com.hk

FOOK LAM MOON

This Michelin-starred restaurant group, also famous for its abalone and roast suckling pig, regularly makes an appearance in top five lists for the city's best mooncakes. Balance and subtlety define the home-grown lotus, egg yolk and Pu'er tea infused mooncakes. HK\$680 (A\$117) for six; HK\$380 (A\$65) for eight mini mooncakes. **Shop 3, G/F, 35-45 Johnston Road, Wan Chai** fooklammoon-grp.com

THE RITZ-CARLTON

Be dazzled at The Ritz-Carlton by the mastery of these perfectly formed mooncakes and awe-inspiring, gold-boxed packaging; they are almost too beautiful to eat. Try the delectable red bean paste and chestnut mooncake for that perfect sweet/nutty/savoury balance. Expect to pay HK\$680 (A\$117) for eight. **International Commerce Centre (ICC), 1 Austin Road West, Hong Kong** ritzcarlton.com/HongKong

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