

Mid-Autumn Festival

Tết Trung Thu or **Mid-autumn Festival**, is also known in Vietnam as the “**Children’s Festival**”. The celebration of the harvest is an important part of Tết Trung Thu, as many Vietnamese live in rural areas and work as farmers. Tết Trung Thu marks **a joyous occasion** when the work is finished and there’s time to spend with loved ones.

While the Mid-autumn Festival originated in China and is celebrated in many Asian countries, the Vietnamese version has its own traditions and legends. Our best-known tale is about a man named Cuội who hung on to a magical banyan tree as it floated up to the moon. We say that if you look closely at the full moon, you can see the shadow of a man sitting under a tree. Children parade lanterns in the streets the night of Mid-autumn Festival to help light the way to earth for Cuội from the moon.

Preparations

In the weeks before Tết Trung Thu, you will see and hear groups of lion dancers practicing on the streets. Mooncake stalls appear on every other corner, pop-ups with elaborately decorated boxes filled with a variety of mystery cakes and fillings. City districts team up with preparations of toys, lanterns and colourful masks in anticipation. The most popular Trung Thu lantern is a star made with red cellophane. You’ll see these lanterns for sale on streets all over Vietnam in the days leading up to the festival.

Mooncake Madness

All across Vietnam, families welcome Tết Trung Thu by placing a five-fruit tray and cakes on our ancestral altar. We offer the food to our ancestors and worship, before feasting on mooncakes -- usually outside under the light of the moon. Round or square, these cakes are moulded with elaborate details of flowers, carp and geometric patterns.

Moonlit celebrations

On the night of the full moon, children bearing brightly coloured lanterns form raucous processions and tour their neighbourhoods singing songs. You will see a male dancer wearing a round happy-faced mask that symbolises the moon. He urges the lion dancers on and delights the crowd with his comical moves. This is the Earth God, Ông Địa, who represents the fullness of the earth and reminds onlookers to give thanks for its bounty. Ông Địa always brings joy and puts a smile on every Vietnamese child’s face.

Lion dancing

Lion dancing or múa lân is an essential element of the Mid-autumn festivities. Groups of children gather, each carrying a red lantern. Everyone sings along to the cheerful Mid-autumn Festival songs memorized since childhood. Excitement peaks when drumbeats ring out from down the dark street. The smaller kids shrink back and the older ones run forward as a mythical lion bursts into their courtyard, its giant head and sinuous body borne by a team of acrobatic dancers.

With its gaping mouth and protruding eyes, the lion is both comical and formidable. The dancers lunge closer to the crowd, making the kids scream and laugh at their antics. Under the light of the full moon, the lion’s red sequined body sparkles as it dances. For Vietnamese children, not much else beats this spectacular performance on the night of Trung Thu.