~ Recommendations ~

- **Dragon Boat Festival**
The Dragon Boat Festival (Duan Wu Jie), is also known as Duan Yang, which means “Upright Sun” or “Double Fifth”. Falling ...

- **Qing Ming Jie (All Souls' Day)**
Qing Ming Jie (清明节), which can be translated to mean “Clear and Bright Festival” or “Pure and Bright Festival”, is similar ...

- **Mid-autumn Festival (Zhong Qiu Jie)**
The Mid-autumn Festival (or Zhong Qiu Jie in Mandarin), also known as the Mooncake Festival, falls on the 15th day of ...

- **Firecrackers**
Firecrackers are called baozhu (爆竹) in Mandarin, meaning “bamboo explosions”. In ancient China, bamboo stems were burnt ...

- **Seven Maidens' Festival**
The Seven Maidens' Festival (Qi Qiao Jie, 乞巧节), also known as Qixi (Seventh Night) Festival or Chinese Valentine's Day, ...

- **Chinese death rituals**
Funeral rituals form an important part of Chinese social life. The Chinese undertake these rituals partly out of filial ...

- **Chinese weddings**
Chinese wedding customs and tradition generally vary according to dialect group. Although modernisation has resulted ...

- **Hongbao giving**
A hongbao (or ang pow in Hokkien) is a gift of money packed into a red packet. Red is considered a symbol of luck, life ...

- **Chinese birth rituals**
For the Chinese, the family is regarded as the primary unit of society. A birth within the family therefore holds special ...

- **Chinese New Year taboos**
Chinese New Year celebrations are accompanied by specific rites and rituals with strict prohibitions and taboos.

- **Capteh**
Capteh is a traditional game that requires great dexterity and balance in keeping a feathered shuttlecock in the air ...

- **Getai**
Getai (歌台), which literally means “song stage” in Chinese, is believed to have originated during the Japanese Occupation ...

- **Chingay**
Chingay is an annual street parade held in Singapore as part of the Lunar New Year celebrations. The term “Chingay” ...

- **Wayang (Chinese Street Opera)**
Wayang, a Malay word meaning “a theatrical performance employing puppets or human dancers”, commonly refers to Chinese ...

- **Singapore International Festival of Arts**
The Singapore International Festival of Arts is an annual highlight of Singapore’s cultural calendar. It began as the ...

- **Nine Emperor Gods Festival**
The Nine Emperor Gods Festival is held from the first to the ninth day of the ninth lunar month among Chinese communities ...

- **Deepavali**
Deepavali, or diwali (literally translated as “a row of lights”; also known as the Festival of Lights), is a festival ...

- **Hopscotch**
Hopscotch is a traditional children’s game in which one or more players hop over a series of squares drawn on the ground. ...

- **Loyang Tua Pek Kong Temple**
The Loyang Tua Pek Kong Temple, located off Loyang Way, was established in the 1980s. The temple owes its existence ...

- **Congkak**
Congkak is a popular game of logic played throughout Asia, Africa and the Americas, with many adaptations. Known elsewhere ...

- **Malay weddings**
Weddings of the Malay community are generally festive, grand and celebratory affairs with many guests. Ceremonies may ...

~ Related Pictures ~

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Zhong Yuan Jie (中元节), also known as the Hungry Ghost Festival, traditionally falls on the 15th day of the seventh month of the lunar calendar. In Singapore, the festival is observed throughout the entire seventh lunar month, which is usually around the month of August of the Western calendar. During this period, many Chinese worship their ancestors and make offerings to wandering souls that roam the earth.
According to traditional Taoist beliefs, the fate of mankind is controlled by three deities: **Tian Guan Da Di**, ruler of heaven, who grants happiness; **Di Guan Da Di**, ruler of earth, who pardons sins; and **Shui Guan Da Di**, ruler of water, who alleviates dangers. **Shang Yuan Jie**, which falls on the 15th day of the first lunar month, and **Xia Yuan Jie** on the 15th day of the tenth lunar month, are the birthdays of the rulers of heaven and water respectively. Zhong Yuan Jie, which falls on the 15th day of the seventh lunar month, is the birthday of **Di Guan Da Di**, who descends to earth on this day to record the good and evil deeds of each human being. 4

During the seventh lunar month, the gates of hell are open and hungry ghosts are released from the netherworld to wander on earth among humans and look for food. 5 Traditionally during this month, Taoist priests would perform rites and make food offerings, while devotees would visit temples to repent their sins, as well as pray for happiness and avoidance of disasters. 6

Buddhists, on the other hand, have traditionally celebrated the Hungry Ghost Festival as the Yu Lan Pen Festival. **Yu lan** means to “hang upside down” in Chinese, while **pen** in this context refers to a container filled with food offerings. 7 **Yu lan pen** thus refers to a container filled with offerings to save one’s ancestors from being suspended in suffering in purgatory. 8 The festival, which originated from the story of Mu Lian, commemorates his filial piety towards his mother. 9 The legend is also believed to be the origin of the Chinese custom of making offerings and praying for one’s ancestors during this annual festival. 10

**Legends**

**Mu Lian**

According to legend, the Yu Lan Pen Festival originated from the attempt by Mu Lian, a disciple of Buddha, to save his mother from torture in hell. 11 His mother, who was a vegetarian, had consumed meat soup unknowingly, and was condemned to hell for denying it. 12 Mu Lian tried to locate his deceased mother in the netherworld and found her among the hungry ghosts. In one version of the story, Mu Lian tried to feed his starving mother, but the food was grabbed by other hungry ghosts. 14 In another version, he sent her a bowl of rice as an offering, but the food turned into flaming coals before it could enter her mouth. 15 Mu Lian sought help from Buddha, who intervened and taught Mu Lian to make offerings of special prayers and food. Only then was Mu Lian’s mother relieved of her sufferings as a hungry ghost. 16

**Dragon King of the Eastern Seas**

A lesser-known legend on the origin of the Hungry Ghost Festival took place during the Tang Dynasty. The legend is about the Dragon King of the Eastern Seas, who was jealous of Li Liang Feng, a famous fortune teller. When Li boastfully claimed that no one could prove his predictions wrong, the Dragon King was infuriated. To discredit Li, he executed a plan which involved disobeying an order from the King of Heaven. Unfortunately, the plan was exposed and the Dragon King was sentenced to death. 17

The Dragon King then approached Emperor Tang Taizong for help. Feeling sorry for him, the emperor promised to do what he could and devised a plan to help save the Dragon King’s life. The plan, however, did not succeed. Shortly after his death, the Dragon King again sought Emperor Tang out in a dream. He reproached the emperor for not keeping his promise, which resulted in his plight as a wandering spirit. The very next day, which was the 15th day of the seventh lunar month, Emperor Tang ordered all Buddhist and Taoist priests in the capital to offer prayers, as well as food and drink for the Dragon King, and this marked the beginning of the Hungry Ghost Festival. 18

**Celebrations**

While the significance of the Hungry Ghost Festival differs between Taoists and Buddhists, the way it is celebrated is similar for both religions in present-day Singapore. 19

Throughout the seventh lunar month, many Chinese observe the festival by making offerings of food, joss sticks, candles, paper money and other paper effigies such as houses, cars and clothes to the dead. 20 As the paper offerings have to be burnt, burning activities in open areas are prevalent, especially on the first, 15th and last day of the festival. 21 To minimise pollution and damage, special containers are provided by the authorities for the burning. 22

It is also a practice in Singapore to hold neighbourhood Zhong Yuan celebrations during the seventh lunar month, which typically include dinners, auctions and stage performances. 23 Participants of these events, many of whom are owners of neighbourhood businesses, make small monthly contributions during the year, and the proceeds are then used to make mass offerings to hungry ghosts during the festival. 24 The offerings usually comprise food items such as rice, oil, canned food, fruits and poles of sugarcane, which are subsequently distributed to participants in buckets. 25

The auction of “auspicious objects”, ranging from religious items to liquor to appliances and toys, usually begins during the multi-course dinner. 26 The most sought-after auction items include charcoal pieces wrapped in gold or yellow paper known as wujin (which means “black gold” in Chinese), “prosperity” incense burners, decorated rice barrels, good-luck tangerines known as da ji, as well as statues of deities. 27 The proceeds from these auctions are used to fund the following year’s Zhong Yuan celebrations, as well as donated to temples and charitable organisations. 28 In addition, outdoor performances are held on makeshift stages to entertain both ghosts and humans, with the front row seats left empty for the spirits. Chinese opera or wayang, which used to be a common sight in the past, has over time been gradually replaced by modern Chinese song performances called getai, which means “song stage” in Chinese. 29

Besides Singapore, the Hungry Ghost Festival is also commonly observed in Malaysia, Taiwan and Hong Kong. 30 The Chinese communities in these three regions observe the festival throughout the seventh lunar month with rituals of prayers and offerings. 31 Like Singapore, the Chinese in Malaysia also celebrate the festival with dinners, auction of auspicious objects, as well as Chinese opera and getai. 32 A highlight of the festival in Hong Kong is the staging of Chinese opera performances in neighbourhoods across the city. 33 In Taiwan, large-scale celebrations are held in various townships and counties. Ceremonies and activities include releasing floating lanterns into the sea; the “grappling with ghosts” event, a competition that requires scaling of heights to be the first to cut down a flag; as well as an annual parade of decorated floats. 34 In China, the festival has become less commonly observed in recent times. It involves prayers, making offerings and floating lanterns on the river on the 15th day of the seventh lunar month. 35

**Taboos**
Believers are also warned against wearing red because it is believed that spirits are drawn to the colour. Drugs and alcohol are to be avoided too as some people believe that it is easier for ghosts to possess those who are intoxicated. In addition, believers should keep away from walls as ghosts like to stick to them, and also refrain from cutting hair, shaving and hanging clothes outside of the house during the night. Furthermore, activities such as getting married, moving house and buying new vehicles are discouraged during this period.

**Variant names**

**Chinese name:** Gui Jie, which means “ghost festival” in Chinese.

**Variant names:** Feast for the Wandering Souls, Mid-Year Festival.

## References


## Author

**Cheryl Sim**
Further resources


The information in this article is valid as at 29 July 2014 and correct as far as we are able to ascertain from our sources. It is not intended to be an exhaustive or complete history of the subject. Please contact the Library for further reading materials on the topic.

Subject
Ethnic festivals--Singapore
Ethnic festivals
People and communities--Customs--Festivities
Heritage and Culture
Singapore--Social life and customs--Chinese
Ethnic Communities--Festivals and Celebrations

I have feedback on this infopedia article: Zhong Yuan Jie (Hungry Ghost Festival)

Name*

Email*
The Hungry Ghost Festival is a traditional Buddhist and Taoist festival held in Singapore. In Chinese culture, the fifteenth day of the seventh month. The festival Originated from China, and on the 15th Day of Luanr 7 Month, it is known as the Zhong Yuan Jie (Festival of the Midde Season), a day Taoists to perform worship to their ancestors and perform salvation rites for the deceased. This day is known as the feast day of Di Guan Da Di (The Earth Official) (中元地官大帝下降考校日). The term “中元” refers to the Earth Official. Hungry Ghost Festival – zhōng yuán jié (中元節) and it falls on August 25 this year (2018). As we are teaching Chinese culture to kids we are also exploring similar culture festivals and comparing it with some similar festivals that are celebrated in other countries. Hungry Ghost Festival- zhōng yuán jié (中元節) image courtesy of MSN. Lunar July Ghost Month (Chinese): 7th Lunar Month (農曆七月) and it reads as “Nóng lì qī yuè” and it literally means “lunar July.” Zhong Yuan Jie (中元节), also known as the Hungry Ghost Festival, traditionally falls on the 15th day of the seventh month of the lunar calendar. In Singapore, the festival is observed throughout the entire seventh lunar month, which is usually around the month of August of the Western calendar. During this period, many Chinese worship their ancestors and make offerings to wandering souls that roam the earth. The Dragon Boat Festival (Duan Wu Jie), is also known as Duan Yang, which means “Upright Sun” or “Double Fifth”. Falling Qing Ming Jie (All Souls’ Day). Qing Ming Jie (清明节), which can be translated to mean “Clear and Bright Festival” or “Pure and Bright Festival”, is similar Mid-autumn Festival (Zhong Qiu Jie).