

HOW TO CELEBRATE THE HUNGRY GHOST FESTIVAL

According to Chinese tradition, the seventh month of the lunar calendar is known as “Ghost Month.” As the story goes, during this month, the gates of hell fly open and restless spirits of the dead are released, free to wander among the realm of the living.

Designed to symbolically and ritualistically appease, comfort, and fulfill these spirits, there are many traditions, rituals, and offerings that happen during what is known as Hungry Ghost Festival — also known as the Hungry Ghosts Festival, Ghost Festival or Ghost Day.

“The Hungry Ghost Festival is considered a time of reunion and remembrance, strengthening the bond between the living and the deceased,” says Janelle Kim, a doctor of Chinese Medicine and author of *Myung Sung: The Korean Art of Living Meditation*.

The festival is an annual event observed primarily by Chinese communities in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, mainland China and regions with diasporic Chinese populations throughout the globe. The origins of the festival are rooted in both the Chinese religion and philosophy known as Taoism (also spelled Daoism), and in Buddhism, which has its roots in India. In Chinese communities, the Hungry Ghost Festival is called Zhongyuan Festival by Taoists and Yulanpen Festival by Buddhists...

While some associate the Hungry Ghost Festival with Halloween — some call the festival “Chinese Halloween” — the main goal of the festival is venerating the dead through spiritual, symbolic, and cultural rituals. Similar traditions around the world that honor the deceased include Día de los Muertos in Mexico, Chūgen and Bon in Japan, Pchum Ben in Cambodia and Sat Thai in Thailand...

What is the Hungry Ghost Festival?

[Scholar Selina Ching] Chan writes that starting with the Song dynasty, Taoist traditions became integrated into the Hungry Ghost Festival. The Taoist tradition emphasizes the needs of hungry ghosts who have been released during Ghost Month. Opposed to peaceful spirits or one’s own family members, hungry ghosts are often those who experienced tragic or wrongful deaths...

“In the [Hungry Ghost Festival] rituals, they commemorated these bachelor fellow-workers who died from industrial accidents or misfortune. It was believed that these people would become vicious ghosts if they were not properly worshiped after death,” she writes...

When is the Hungry Ghost Festival?

The Hungry Ghost Festival takes place during a single day of Ghost Month, which is during the seventh month of the Chinese lunar calendar...

The Hungry Ghost Festival is usually held on the 15th day of the seventh month of the lunar calendar, though some regions celebrate it on the 14th day of the month.

How should I celebrate the Hungry Ghost Festival?

People celebrate the Hungry Ghost Festival through various rituals designed to honor, acknowledge, and satisfy the spirits of the dead. These practices include active objects and gestures that people can offer to spirits as well as superstitions and practices to avoid during Ghost Month.

“The Hungry Ghost Festival involves various rituals aimed at appeasing the hungry ghosts and providing them with offerings. People make food offerings, burn incense and joss paper, and set up temporary altars or stages for performances. These offerings are meant to provide nourishment and fulfill the needs of the wandering spirits,” says Kim...

Practices to avoid during the Hungry Ghost Festival:

- Ghosts are known to have their strongest energy at night, so you should try to get home before dark. Children, the elderly, and pregnant people are known to be especially vulnerable during the evening.
- You never want to take food or money that belongs to ghosts, lest you offend a spirit, so don't touch any offerings prepared by others that you might see outside.
- It is believed that if you hang clothes outside to dry, wandering ghosts may get caught in the loose garments, and you'll bring the spirits inside your home by accident.
- One superstition is that ghosts will try to drown people in order to reincarnate themselves into living bodies. Swimming and water activities are generally avoided during Ghost Month.
- It is advised to avoid important events like weddings and surgeries, along with things like buying a new house or opening a business during the Hungry Ghost Festival and Ghost Month.

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Housekeeping. <https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/holidays/a44290442/hungry-ghost-festival-celebrations/>