

Japan: Seasonal Series

September/October Moon Viewing

Otsukimi or Tsukimi (月見) literally means “Moon Viewing” and is an autumn festival in Japan celebrating the Harvest Moon. The festival is also known as jugoya (十五夜) meaning “15th night” as it was traditionally observed on this night of the lunar calendar. The 15 September is still associated with the festival although the actual full moon varies each year, falling in September or October.



The origins of the custom are thought to date back to the Heian period in Japan (794 – 1185). It is not as popular to observe this festival as it once was, since more and more people live in cities and their view of the moon is obstructed. However, people in rural areas are more likely to continue the tradition, since praying to the moon is generally linked to praying for a rich harvest of rice.

Food and Decorations

Round white rice dumplings called Tsukimi Dango are offered to the moon and other seasonal foods such as chestnuts, sweet potatoes, edamame and persimmons may also be displayed. Pampas grass (susuki in Japanese) is a common decoration for Tsukimi as it resembles a rice plant and therefore symbolises a good harvest. All these items are usually set up in a room from which the moon can be easily seen.



Many restaurants and fast-food chains also produce special editions of their products for Tsukimi; for example adding an egg to symbolise the full moon to hamburgers or ramen.

Legend of the Rabbits on the Moon

Rabbits are also a common design feature of Tsukimi products and decorations. This may be because, according to legend, rabbits live on the moon and appear to be making rice dumplings, by pounding rice with a hammer.