

*Worshipping  
the  
Vietnamese way ...*

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The most important events for Vietnamese people during the year are: "New Year" and "Middle Autumn Moon Festival".

Vietnamese New Year's day is a day of great significance in traditional culture, the first day of the lunar year. It is the day children buy gifts for their parents. They strongly believe that all days during the year will be determined by what happens on that day, so they try to do and to say everything in a nice way. They never clean their house on these days, even if its very dirty, in the belief that if you clean your house on those days, you will sweep away the good things and that means you may lose all of your good luck. They must be careful with their language in their conversation with one another. The first person who steps into their houses must be a very important one because their good fortune during the coming year depends on that person. So if someone feel that they are not good enough, for example they owe money or they have not had success in business or study, or if their family has broken up etc they will not feel comfortable to be out visiting. Vietnamese parents do not really expect their children to celebration their parents' birthday, or on Mothers' and Fathers' Day like the West, but if the children forget to give greetings or bring gifts to their parent on the first day of the year, this will be seen as a very great disappointment.

Vietnamese Moon Festival, also called "Children's Festival" coincides with the Vietnamese national holiday and is a great time for the children. In Vietnam we call it "Middle Autumn Festival" though this term is no longer suitable in Australia due to the different climate and season. It is celebrated on the 15th night of August in the Lunar calendar. It is the time when the moon is thought to shine at its brightest and the beautiful moonlit nights occur at a time of the year when the weather is most cool and pleasant. It is a time of gathering and the children parade through the streets at night with lanterns, singing and candles illuminate the beautiful colours and myriad shapes of the lanterns. The festival has inspired countless folk songs and children stories. In preparing for the festival, lanterns are constructed from bright-coloured paper glued onto bamboo

frames and inside every lantern is a small candle. It is also a time for competitions for the best lantern. Parents help their children to make lanterns and bake moon cakes.

While the children parade with lanterns singing, dancing happily on the street, parents and other adults sit together sipping strong tea, marvelling at the moonlight and enjoying the delightful tastes of the moon cakes and the scent of special flowers which bloom only at night, reminiscing of the old days. When they return home, the children enjoy a festive meal and indulge in the moon cakes. Legends associated with the moon go back through the hazy mists of time. For thousands of years the Vietnamese have found their lives closely entwined with The Middle Autumn Festival. Most of the festivals in Vietnam are during the full moon, for a very simple reason: most of the villages in Vietnam do not have electricity, and they use the brightness of the moon. To the Chinese and Vietnamese, they called the moon "Cung trang" which means the palace of the beautiful Lady called "Hang Nga" who is living with her friends. Later on, she saved a young boy on earth who had done a lot of good work in helping others, especially the sick. His name is "Cuoi", children called that character "Uncle Cuoi", which has become the word "Uncle" in Vietnamese that is used to address someone who you feel close to almost like their own father.

Both of these cultural events are celebrated in Christian worship. Special services are held to worship God, to pray for blessings and to proclaim the Good News to people in the wider community as well as giving of food or goods to less fortunate families can caring for orphans.