Day Trips: Boston Chinatown



by Elsa Yeung

This weekend is the Chinese Mid-Autumn Festival, and what better way to explore Chinese culture than a visit to Chinatown in Boston?

First, some history: The Mid-Autumn Festival has been celebrated since 3,000 years ago during the Western Zhou Dynasty. This year's festival falls on Sunday, September 30th, but because ancient China used the lunar calendar, the exact date changes from year to year on our solar calendar. Celebrations include gathering with family for a meal, carrying colorful lanterns, and eating moon cakes.

Legend also has it that moon cakes were used in overthrowing Mongolian rule in China during the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368). Rebels distributed moon cakes that secretly contained slips of paper spreading the word to "revolt on the 15th day of the eighth lunar month." The successful rebellion resulted in the dawn of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).



Moon cakes are often filled

with a salted egg yolk,
which represents the moon.

Moon cakes are pastries made with a sweet lotus seed paste and can be found all over Chinatown this time of year. You can spot them in every pastry shop window in a variety of sizes. They are commonly filled with sweet red bean paste or large salted egg yolks representative of the moon. Moon cakes are pretty dense and are usually cut into small slices and shared with friends, so bring a couple of your buddies for a fun day in Boston's Chinatown!

Recommended restaurants:

Gourmet Dumpling House (52 Beach Street)

It is rare to see Gourmet Dumpling House without a line out the door because it is so delicious! The restaurant specializes in Northern Chinese and Taiwanese cuisine, which emphasize noodles and dumplings. Their best dishes include (of course) dumplings of any kind, home style braised eggplant, kung pao chicken, and beef noodle soup.

Peach Farm Seafood (4 Tyler Street)

You've had fish and chips, and lobster rolls. Now get ready for seafood Chinese style! Peach Farm serves some great clams in black bean sauce, salt and pepper shrimp, lobster with ginger and scallion, and any kind of fish (which they will bring live in a bucket to the table for you to inspect before throwing it in the pan).



Boston’s Chinatown is full of great food and interesting shops.

Hong Kong Eatery (79 Harrison Avenue)

You can’t miss Hong Kong Eatery, because they’ve got whole roasted ducks hanging out in the window! If you’re lucky, you’ll spot a whole roast pig there as well. Hong Kong Eatery’s menu is typical of Cantonese casual dining, which is usually a hit with young, old, rich, and poor alike. The roast duck is great, and you can order it paired with Chinese BBQ pork (a must) and/or crispy roast pork (if available). Their fried rice and wonton noodle soups are also always great.

China Pearl (9 Tyler Street)

For a real dining adventure, head to China Pearl where you can have a traditional dim-sum brunch. At a dim-sum restaurant, servers push around carts of food to each table, where you can pick and choose dishes to be shared with the rest of the table. Typically, each dish is small so that you can sample a large variety of foods. Favorite dim-sum foods include pork buns, shrimp dumplings, turnip cakes, sticky rice, and egg tarts (a close cousin of the Portuguese custard pastry).

The best part of eating in Chinatown is that meals come relatively cheap. Just remember to bring cash, because a lot of places don’t take plastic. Chinatown is conveniently located next to several T stops and is also right next to the Boston Common, where you can enjoy a nice stroll in the park

after stuffing yourself with Chinese treats and wandering through Chinatown’s many novelty shops.