

The moon in Chinese culture represents nostalgia and homesickness, and the top crust of each moon-shaped pastry is generally imprinted with the Chinese characters for longevity or harmony?and often the name of the bakery and the filling.

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This year, the fancy gift boxes that have long driven the mooncake trade are particularly striking and rich with tradition.

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For example, the Fairmont Peace Hotel in Shanghai, built in 1929 and a magnet for Hollywood celebrities in the 1930s, has prepared a selection of mooncake gift boxes with designs inspired by the beauty and elegance of the hotel's famous art deco style. The simplest box of four pieces (red-bean paste, creamy custard, plain cheese, green-bean paste) is 198 yuan (\$29.64), while more lavish selections of five or six pieces, including mooncakes with egg yolk, run up to 338 yuan for a box.

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Beijing's Nuo Hotel, meanwhile, has created Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) inspired mooncake gift packs based on the design of porcelain vases in the hotel lobby, with the essence of landscape painting using Zhang Dai's poetic passages to depict the peaceful harmony of man and nature. The box of six is 158 yuan, and includes mooncakes ranging from cheese mango to charcoal burning fragrant Pu'er tea and white lotus with egg yolk. A box of eight cakes of different flavors is 228 yuan.

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