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Zongzi

These Bamboo-Leaf Wrapped Bundles Are a Dragon Boat Festival Treat


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By AMY MA

It's gooey, aromatic and delicious," says food writer Fuchsia Dunlop about zongzi, or "glutinous rice wrapped in indocalamus (giant bamboo) leaves and stuffed with savory or sweet fillings."

Celebrity chef Martin Yan calls zongzi "good of Chinese comfort food," adding, "Every sticky bite takes me back to my childhood in Guangzhou with my mom and aunts chatting in the kitchen as they wrap up a batch."



All zongzi features a bamboo-leaf wrapping and is trussed with twine or thin seaweed leaves before it is boiled or steamed until the contents are tender and fully cooked. The shape of the bundle and what's inside – aside from the requisite sticky rice – varies and is often a clue to its geographic origins.

Long, cylindrical-shaped zongzi called xian rou zong – what you'll typically find in Zhejiang, Hunan or Shanghai – are stuffed with marinated pork and rice. Large, pyramid-shaped zongzi, called guo jing zong, come from Guangdong and contain rice, salted duck egg yolk, black mushroom, dried shrimp, cooked peanuts, roasted chestnuts, Chinese sausage, abalone and char siu (roasted pork). Taiwanese prefer smaller, pyramid-shaped zongzi with fillings similar to the Cantonese guo jing zong just described, but season the rice with rendered pork fat, soy sauce and bits of deep-fried shallots.

Sweet zongzi look just like the savory kind, but in most cases they're filled with red-bean paste and are especially popular in the northern areas of China, says Chef Yan.

Zongzi has spread with the Chinese diaspora, and today there are variations in Malaysian, Cambodian, Vietnamese and Thai cuisine. "The Japanese even have a version called chimaki, which they make during Children's Day (May 5th)," says Fergus Fung, co-founder of the WOM Guide, a Hong Kong restaurant review book.

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