

The Dragon Boat Festival

Case study as part of an evaluation of Auckland Council's investment into Arts and Culture in Auckland.

November 2025





Mihi and acknowledgement

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Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou katoa.

This case study forms part of a broader evaluation of the Value of Auckland Council's investment in the arts and culture sector. This project was commissioned and funded by Auckland Council.

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The Dragon Boat Festival: Background

About The Dragon Boat Festival

The Dragon Boat Festival (Duanwu Festival) is a traditional Chinese cultural festival that is celebrated on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, typically in May or June. It commemorates the patriotic poet Qu Yuan with dragon boat races and the eating of zongzi (sticky rice dumplings). The festival, which originated at least 1,500 years ago, is now celebrated around the world. When the Waitakere Chinese Association and the Chinese Association of West Auckland sought to hold the festival in Auckland, they hoped to provide a platform to celebrate and uplift Chinese culture, alongside other cultures in Tāmaki Makaurau.

“Dragon Boat Festival is quite important in China, and we want to bring this activity here to integrate the Chinese culture into New Zealand culture.”

- Chinese Association

The Auckland Dragon Boat Festival was hosted by the Waitakere Chinese Association, the Chinese Association of West Auckland, and the Corban Estate and Arts Centre (CEAC) in 2025. The 2025 events attracted over 1000 attendees, with many cultural food vendors, community groups and local leaders in attendance. The festival is free and family-friendly, drawing participants from a variety of ages and cultural backgrounds.

“They know how to run an event. They have all of their different groups do different dances with particular costume. We had over 30 that were just one after the other, they do ballroom dancing, they do cultural dancing, it's all a mix of everything.”

- Corban Estate staff



The Dragon Boat Festival: Working in partnership to deliver value through investment

The Dragon Boat Festival was delivered through a partnership between the Waitakere Chinese Association, the Chinese Association of West Auckland, Auckland Council and Corban Estate Arts Centre (CEAC). With modest financial investment leveraged from multiple sources, the festival created a significant cultural celebration and laid the groundwork for the delivery of future events.

A partnership approach to festival delivery

The Waitakere Chinese Association is the largest Chinese organisation in the region and is administered by a committee comprising a chair, secretary, treasurer and other elected members. When designing and planning the Dragon Boat Festival, the organisation identified a need for a partnered approach to support their own event management capabilities and resourcing. Public events require a complex range of organisational requirements, including health and safety, permit administration, traffic management, first aid and security, and Auckland Council were able to provide support to navigate some of these requirements.

“Here's a group that really wants to be a part of community, they're really struggling in the sense that they're trying to understand the ins and outs of Council, event permits, TMPs, all of that sort of thing.”

– Corban Estate staff

Auckland Council, through the Corban Estate and Arts Centre (CEAC), saw the opportunity presented by the festival, and looked to build their capacity to host events such as this in the future. In 2024, CEAC brought in a senior event manager to work alongside the Chinese Association to plan, apply for permits and run the event through a team of volunteers and contracted support. They worked to build an understanding of each step of the event management process and developed capability to undertake this for themselves in the future.

“Once we created the blueprint, then it was kind of like, okay do you guys want to do this again and [what] do you want to do. We were establishing a commitment to support them throughout this process and educate everybody in that space.”

- Auckland Council

“It was to enable that community to feel like ‘I can do this’ and that's what we ultimately wanted to achieve.”

– Corban Estate staff

Leveraging modest financial investment for a significant cultural event

The Dragon Boat Festival draws on investment from a range of sources to bring about a culturally significant event that can be repeated in future years. Regional Arts and Culture contributed \$30,000 in financial resources and the Chinese Association contributed \$3,000 of their own funds, and CEAC itself receives significant operational funding through the Henderson-Massey local board. Other funds were also leveraged through local community trusts.

Of equal significance was the investment of time and expertise by CEAC and experienced event managers to develop the skills of the Chinese Association to run the event in subsequent years. The guidance and support given to the Chinese Association enabled them to organise the festival for themselves in 2025, together with a larger Chinese food and culture festival in late 2024, which is similarly planned for 2025.

“The Corban Estate provided the venue and sometimes assisted us to apply for event permits and they give us a lot of very good advice.”

- Chinese Association



The Dragon Boat Festival: Building artistic, social and cultural capital

The Dragon Boat Festival brings Chinese traditions, food, and art into a public setting where people of all backgrounds can participate and learn. The festival is a platform for artists and performers to share their cultural artforms with large audiences, while also creating opportunities for older and younger generations to connect through shared celebration.

Celebrating community diversity and cultural artforms

The Dragon Boat Festival celebrates cultural diversity in Auckland. Rooted in Chinese cultural traditions, the festival brings a vibrant expression of Chinese identity into the Auckland community. By holding the event in a public venue with activities that are accessible and engaging, such as kite making, dragon spotting, calligraphy, Chinese painting and shared food, the festival provides a space where cultural practices are shared openly with people of all backgrounds. The opportunity to share cultural artforms with the broader community was particularly meaningful for stallholders and those from the Chinese Association who were proud of the teamwork to make the event possible.

“This event provides a platform for the Chinese community, people can join each other and it's a big contribution to the Chinese community... It has historic meaning for Chinese.”

- Event stallholder

“We attracted a lot of people to come enjoy the food and performance and they learned about a lot of Chinese culture and tradition. We feel proud because it's not just one or two people, we work together.”

- Chinese Association

Opportunities for artists to feature their work and share traditional artforms

The festival created opportunities for artists to share their own cultural art with the wider community, providing visibility and exposure for traditional artists. Performances included Chinese traditional dances, songs, music, choir, instruments, Tai Ji, Cheongsam (or Qipao) show, dragon dance and lion dance. Event performers appreciated having significant audiences to share their art with. In a separate on-site venue, Chinese arts and crafts could be learned and practiced, including calligraphy and kite making.

They provide opportunity for our dance group to perform in front of the main audience. When we danced, there are two to three hundred people watching. I think that's quite exciting for us.”

- Event performer

We were doing kite making, traditional calligraphy and we had people there that were skilled in calligraphy and showing people how they did it, brush marking, cutting, paper cutting.

- Corban Estate staff

Bringing together multiple generations

The festival's delivery also generated multi-generational benefits. Some of the performers were older Chinese migrants who had settled in Auckland after their children had established themselves. Through participating in cultural celebration, they were able to build connections and networks with other older Chinese migrants, while also contributing to the wider community. As one attendee reflected, the festival provided a meaningful way of "giving back to the country that hosts them."

"We have the stores outside, and Chinese arts, and the children's play areas, not just for the adults, for the three generations of a whole family."

- Chinese Association

"They are not only for adult, for older people, they also for children, for young generation to participate in some performance."

- Event performer



The Dragon Boat Festival: Delivering value for the people of Tāmaki Makaurau

The Dragon Boat Festival fostered intercultural connection by creating opportunities for West Auckland residents of many backgrounds to experience and celebrate Chinese traditions together. Its inclusive approach encouraged curiosity, participation, and a stronger sense of belonging across communities.

Creating community cohesion across different cultures

The Dragon Boat Festival illustrated an opportunity to strengthen community cohesion by bringing the wider West Auckland community together. Creating a touchpoint for multicultural engagement encouraged curiosity from attendees of different ethnic backgrounds and an opportunity to experience Chinese culture in a meaningful and celebratory way. Interviewees reflected on the impact that was felt from Samoan and Māori performance groups attending in 2024, as well as the longer lasting dragon-spotting artistic display at the Centre that fostered interest from local school groups and rangatahi.

“I think what makes it special is it’s not only for Chinese people, I know the organisers give invitations to all the people around the West Auckland area.”

– Event performer

“Our artists and even ourselves, we made dragons of every shape and description, and they were placed all around the Centre and you had to find them... And funnily enough, we had school groups that would come in, saying we came here to look for the dragons.”

– Corban Estate staff

Performers and event organisers strongly valued how the stalls and festival offerings provided ways for the West Auckland community to deepen their knowledge of Chinese culture. The importance of the Dragon Boat Festival in China fostered a desire to share this celebration with Auckland residents. Members of the Chinese community shared their cuisine through free food stalls, zongzi and sticky rice demonstrations. Calligraphy sessions and arts classes delivered insight into traditional art forms, and free entry created an educative experience that was inclusive.

“When we make the sticky rice, the zongzi or dumpling, we demonstrate in front of people, and they learn how to do that too.”

– Chinese Association

There was a sense of hope that the ongoing delivery of cultural celebrations like the Dragon Boat Festival form a way to break down cultural divides and contribute to wider senses of belonging and ownership felt among Chinese residents across Tāmaki Makaurau.

“I think it's always hard if you are a community from another country that are trying to feel safe and secure in a space.”

– Corban Estate staff

