

Pancakes and Pyrotechnics: Navigating Fire Risks on Shrove Tuesday and Chinese New Year in Busy Kitchens

Imagine the scene on Tuesday February 17 2026. Your restaurant in Stafford or Crewe is buzzing. One side of the kitchen is a whirlwind of batter and hot pans as families queue for their annual pancake fix. On the other, red lanterns sway gently and the scent of spiced dishes fills the air for Chinese New Year celebrations. It's a perfect fusion of two lively traditions landing on the exact same day this year. But in the rush to keep everyone happy, one distracted flip or one forgotten lantern could turn the night into something no one wants to remember.

This year's rare overlap of **Shrove Tuesday** (Pancake Day) and **Chinese New Year** (the start of the Year of the Fire Horse) creates a double celebration that many venues will jump on. Globally, these events are massive. In China and across Asia, hundreds of millions mark Lunar New Year with fireworks, firecrackers and floating lanterns. **The result?** A well-documented spike in fires and dangerous air pollution. Cities have introduced strict bans in recent years because the fire risk and smoke are simply too high.

Back home in the UK, the scale is smaller but the dangers hit closer to home for restaurants, bars and cafés. Cooking fires already make up the majority of incidents attended by fire services. On Pancake Day alone, claims for fire damage have historically almost doubled compared with a normal Tuesday. Add Chinese New Year elements: woks blazing at high heat, paper decorations, and perhaps a few outdoor lanterns or small pyrotechnics, and busy kitchens face a perfect storm.

The biggest threat in any commercial kitchen is distraction. On a normal service you might flip a dozen pancakes without drama. On February 17 you could be doing ten times that while also juggling special menus, larger crowds and extra staff. Hot oil for pancakes or stir-fries can ignite in seconds if left unattended. Grease fires spread fast and water makes them worse. Then there are the decorative touches: sky lanterns released outside (still popular despite warnings) have started serious fires in the UK before, drifting into rooftops or dry grass. Even indoor paper lanterns near heat sources or overloaded sockets for fairy lights can quickly become a problem.

I've seen first-hand through my placement at DMB Services (Staffs) Ltd how quickly small oversights escalate. Extra equipment brought in for themed nights: portable hobs, extra fridges,

sound systems; often means more plugs, extension leads and potential loose connections. One national client we worked with under NDA discovered exactly that: loose wiring in distribution boards triggered multiple electrical fires. A protective product we recommended stopped a fire in its tracks within days of fitting. The same principle applies in restaurants. A few well-placed safeguards can make all the difference.

So how do you enjoy the celebrations without courting disaster?

Start with the basics in the kitchen. Never leave pans unattended, not even for a second when the dining room is full and orders are flying. Keep a proper wet chemical extinguisher (not just a standard foam one) right by the cooking area for grease fires. Clear clutter from work surfaces and make sure tea towels and aprons stay well away from flames. For Chinese New Year elements, swap floating lanterns for safer LED versions or battery-operated candles. If you must use real flames, mount them securely and well clear of anything that can burn.

Think ahead about the whole venue. Do a proper fire risk assessment now, before the bookings flood in. Check that emergency exits are unobstructed, that staff know exactly what to do if the alarm sounds, and that everyone understands how to handle different types of fire. Overloaded electrics are a hidden killer during busy periods, get your systems looked at properly rather than hoping for the best.

At DMB Services we've noticed a real uptick in enquiries from hospitality businesses since the tragic bar fire in Switzerland. Owners are suddenly very aware that one preventable incident can close a much-loved local venue for good. That's why we work closely with independent insurance risk assessors and offer practical, tailored solutions for places just like yours across Staffordshire and Cheshire.

The beauty of both Pancake Day and Chinese New Year is the joy they bring; families laughing over flipped pancakes, friends toasting the new year with vibrant food and colour. You don't have to choose between atmosphere and safety. A few smart steps mean you can deliver unforgettable evenings without the nightmare of flames where they don't belong.

If you run a restaurant, bar or café in the area and want to make sure February 17 goes smoothly, drop us a line at DMB Services. We'll help you assess the risks, recommend the right protections, and keep your team and customers safe so the only sparks flying are the ones of excitement.

Here's to full tables, happy customers and absolutely zero drama, except on the plate!

DMB Services, keeping Staffordshire and Cheshire safe and compliant.