

Cultural Holidays

This page contains definitions of many Cultural Holidays/Observances that are celebrated around the world. I hope that this reference is helpful in furthering peace and understanding among and between all peoples.

Please note that some listings do not have dates associated with them. In many cases it means that the date of the observance changes each year.

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Advent:

Christian Observance

Period of four weeks in which Christians prepare for Christmas.

All Saints Day: November 1

Roman Chatholic and Protestant Observance

Christian celebration of lives of all the saints, especially those not having a special day; Eastern Orthodox churches observe day in mid-summer.

Annunciation: March 25

Christian Observance

This feast remembers the visit of Archangel Gabriel to Mary, during which God's wish for her to become the mother of Jesus is announced.

Armenian Martyrs' Day: April 24

Observe the extermination of some 1.5 million Armenians between 1915-1923 in Turkey.

Asian Heritage Month: The Month of May

Month-long celebration of the history and achievements of Asian-Americans.

Ascension Day:

Roman Catholic; Protestant Observance; and Eastern Orthodox Christian.

Celebrates Jesus' ascent into heaven.

Ash Wednesday:

Roman Catholic and Protestant Observance

Begins Christian Lent; name derives from symbolic use of ashes to signify penitence.

Baha'u'llah's Birthday: November 12

Baha'i Observance

Commemorates the birth of the founder of the Baha'i faith in 1817.

Bikaramajit:

Hindu Observance

Hindu New Year.

Birthday of Guru Gobind Singh Ji:

Sikh Observance

Observes the birth in 166C.E. of the tenth guru, who created the Khalsa (the army of the Pure Ones) and passed on the guruship to the Sikh Holy Scriptures-Guru Granth Sahib Ji.

Birth of the Bab: October 20

Baha'i Observance

Anniversary of the birth of one of the twin Prophet Founders of the Baha'i Faith.

Black History Month: The Month of February

Dedicated to the study of Black life and culture.

Bodhi Day: December 8

Buddhist Observance

Buddhist celebration of the Enlightenment of Buddha, ca.596 B.C.E.

Brotherhood/Sisterhood Week:

Promotes cooperation and justice among all religious, racial, and ethnic groups in the U.S., sponsored by the National Conference.

Canada Day: July 1

Acknowledges the creation of the Dominion of Canada on July 1, 1867. Observed with formal celebrations across the country, it is recognised as the nation's principal national holiday.

Chinese, Korean, Japanese New Year:

A festive holiday celebrated for about two week. Each year is symbolized be a different animal.

El Cinco De Mayo: May 5

Celebrated in Mexico and by Mexican-Americans, commemorates the battle of Guadalupe in 1862, when a small Mexican army defeated a larger French force.

Christmas Day: December 25

Christian Observance

The observance of Christmas is celebrated by Christians around the world to mark the birth of Jesus Christ. Known as the season of Advent, it is a time to reflect on the deeper meaning of faith. Through the birth of Jesus Christ, Christians are reminded of how God has entered the material world of time and death in which each of us live. In a world that can sometimes be cold and lonely, Christmas speaks of hope and love.

Citizenship (Constitution) Day: September 17

The rights and responsibilities of citizenship are stressed on this day marking the passage of the U.S. Constitution in 1787.

Diwali:

Hindu, Sikh, and Jain Observance

Festival of Lights; one of four seasonal celebrations in India. Jains celebrate Diwali as the time when Mahavir left for heaven (Mahavir Nirvana). Sikhs celebrate Diwali in commemoration of the return to Amritsar of the sixth guru after his release from detention.

Dusserah:

Hindu, and Jain Observance

Essentially a celebration of good over evil; related to early stories of struggles between a goddess and a demon.

Epiphany: January 6th

Christian Observance

End of the 12 days of Christmas; celebrates visit of the Three Kings to baby Jesus and also baptism of Jesus; especially important to Eastern Orthodox and in Hispanic Culture.

Feast of St. Basil: January 1

Eastern Orthodox Christian Observance

St. Basil was an early leader of Eastern Christianity and a major saint in Orthodoxy; his day celebrates the Orthodox liturgy.

Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary: August 15

Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christian Observance

Commemorates the assumption of Mary, mother of Jesus, into heaven.

Feast of the Immaculate Conception: December 8

Roman Catholic Observance

Celebrates the Christian belief that Mary, mother of Jesus, was born without sin.

Festival of Our Lady of Guadalupe: December 12

Roman Catholic Observance

Honors the patron saint of Mexico.

Flag Day: June 14

Commemorates acceptance of the stars and stripes as the U.S. flag in 1777. A legal holiday in some states.

Good Friday:

Roman Catholic and Protestant Observance

The day of Jesus' crucifixion.

Guru Nanak's Birthday:

Sikh Observance

Observes the birth of the founder of the Sikh religion in 1469 C.E.

Hanukkah (Chanukah):

Jewish Observance

Jewish festival of lights, eight-day commemoration of the rededication of the Second Temple in 165 B.C.E.

Holi:

Hindu Observance

Spring festival, a carnival occasion featuring bright colors, pilgrimages, and bonfires.

Holy Friday:

Eastern Orthodox Christian Observance

The day of Jesus' crucifixion.

'Id al-Adha:

Islamic Observance

Islamic festival of sacrifice, commemorates the faith of Abraham; also a memorial to the dead.

Eid al-Fitr:

Islamic Observance

Islamic festival of the breaking of the fast of Ramadhan.

Installation of Granth Sahib Ji as Guru:

Sikh Observance

Anniversary of passing on of guruship to the Holy Scriptures by the tenth guru (1708 C.E.).

International Women's Day

In 1908, on the last Sunday in February, socialist women in the United States initiated the first Women's Day when large demonstrations took place calling for the vote and the political and economic rights of women. The following year, 2,000 people attended a Women's Day rally in Manhattan. Later that year women garment workers staged a general strike. 20-30,000 shirtwaist makers struck for 13 cold, winter weeks for better pay and working conditions. In 1910 socialists and feminists went to the second International Conference of Socialist Women in Copenhagen to propose that Women's Day become an international event.

Juneteeth

African-American Observance.

"Juneteeth", commemorates June 1, 1865, the day most slaves learned they were free-more than two years after President Lincoln had declared them free.

Krishna Janmashtami:

Hindu Observance

Celebrates the birth of Krishna.

Kwanzaa: December 26

African-American Observance

Seven-day celebration of African-American values and traditions and their continued vitality. "Kwanzaa", in Kiswahili, means "first fruits of the harvest".

Lent:

Period of Christian preparation for Easter; usually 40 days.

Maghi:

Sikh Observance

Commemorates a battle in which forty sikhs (the Immortal Ones) laid down their lives for their guru (Guru Gobind Singh Ji).

Mahavir Jayanti:

Sikh Observance

Birthday of Lord Mahavir.

Martyrdom of the Bab: July 9

Baha'i Observance

Anniversary of the martyrdom of the Bab, the forerunner of Baha'u'llah, in 1850.

Martyrdom Day(Guru Arjan Dev Ji):

Anniversary of the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev Ji in 1606 C.E., the fifth guru who had built the famous Golden Temple of Amritsar.

Martyrdom Day(Guru Teg Bahadur Ji):

Anniversary of the martyrdom of Guru Teg Bahadur Ji in 1675 C.E., the ninth guru.

Ma'uled Al-Nabi:

Islamic Observance

Birthday of the Prophet Mohammed, ca 570 C.E..

Maundy Thursday:

Roman Catholic and Protestant Observance

Commemorates the last supper when Jesus instituted the Holy Eucharist (Lord's Supper).

Muharram:

Islamic Observance

Islamic New Year.

National American Indian Heritage Month: November

Designated by Congress in 1990, the observance, held during the traditional Indian harvest season, honors the distinct and important contributions of the first Americans to the nation and the world..

National Hispanic Heritage Month: September

Month-long celebration of the history and achievements of Hispanic-Americans. Runs from September 15th to October 15th.

National Women's History Month: March

Designated by U.S. Congress as a time to salute women's role in history; includes International Women's Day (March 8).

Nativity of Jesus Christ: January 7

Eastern Orthodox Christian Observance

Christmas celebration of those Orthodox Christians who follow the Julian calendar.

Nativity of St. John the Baptist: June 24

Roman Catholic and Protestant Observance

Celebrates the birth of New Testament figure; patron saint of Puerto Rico; observed especially in Latino culture.

Naw-Ruz: March 21

Baha'i Observance

Baha'i and Iranian New Year.

Nirvana Day: February 15

Buddhist Observance

Commemorates the death of Buddha.

Palm Sunday:

Eastern Orthodox Christian Observance

Opens Christian Holy Week; recalls entry of Jesus into Jerusalem.

Paryushana Parva:

Sikh Observance

Festival of fasting, friendship, and forgiveness.

Passover:

Jewish Observance

Eight day celebration marking the deliverance of the Jews from slavery in Egypt; "Seder" ceremonies emphasize concept of freedom.

Pentecost:

Roman Catholic and Protestant Observance

Celebrates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon early Christians following ascension of Jesus; sometimes called "birthday of the church". Name indicates time 50 days after Easter.

Pioneer Day: July 24

Mormon Observance

Mormon observance of the arrival of Brigham Young at the site of Salt Lake City, Utah.

Purim:

Jewish Observance

Feast of Lots. celebrates deliverance of the Jews of ancient Persia from a plot to destroy them.

Rakhi:

Hindu and Jain Observance

Celebration of love and friendship; traditionally women tied a "rakhi" (amulet) to sisters, brothers and friends to ward off evil.

Ramadhan:

Islamic Observance

Ramadhan is the ninth month in the Islamic calendar during which Muslims fast. The month of Ramadhan is also believed to be the time when the Holy Qur'an was sent down from heaven, a declaration of direction, and a means of salvation. During Ramadhan, it is common for Muslims to go to the *Masjid* (Mosque) and spend several hours praying and studying the Qur'an. When the fast ends (on the first day of the month of *Shawwal* it is celebrated for three days in a holiday called *Eid al-Fitr* (the feast of Breaking Fast). Friends and family gather to pray in congregation.

Ramnavami:

Hindu Observance

Anniversary of the birth of Rama, incarnation of Vishnu (the Preserved) in Hinduism.

Reformation Day: October 31

Protestant Observance

Commemorates the start of the Protestant Reformation in 1517 with the posting of Martin Luther's 95 theses.

Ridvan:

Baha'i Observance

Commemorates the declaration of Baha'u'llah to his followers in 1863. Work is suspended for the 1st, 9th, and 12th days.

Rosh Hashanah:

Jewish Observance

Jewish New Year beginning 10 days of penitence concluded on Yom Kippur.

Saint Patrick's Day: March 17

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Saint Nicholas Day: December 6

Christian Observance

Advent of spring; sacred to Saraswati, goddess of learning.

San Gennaro Day: September 19

Roman Catholic Observance

The day begins a three-day festival in honor of the patron saint of Naples, popular among Italian-Americans.

Shavuot:

Jewish Observance

Jewish Festival of Weeks; celebrates harvest of first fruits and commemorates the giving of the Torah and Commandments at Mt Sinai.

Shemini 'Atzeret:

Jewish Observance

Eighth and last day of Sukkot.

Simchat Torah:

Jewish Observance

Joyous festival in which the reading cycle of the Torah is completed and its first book begun again. Symbolized by singing, dancing, and marching around the Synagogue with Torah scrolls.

Sri Ramakrishna Jayanti:

Hindu Observance

Celebrates the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna teacher of Swami Vivekananda.

Sukkot:

Jewish Observance

Jewish festival of booths (or tabernacles) and the fall harvest; takes name from the booths used by Israelites during desert wanderings.

Three Kings Day: January 6

Eastern Orthodox Christian Observance

The celebration of "Three Kings Day" takes place on the 6th of January and is commonly known as the celebration of the *Epiphany*. Observed throughout Europe and Latin America it is also known as "Little Christmas".

It is told that three kings set out from three different parts of the known world following a star, in search of the "King of Kings", to Jerusalem. These three kings were named Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthazar. Arriving in Jerusalem on the 6th of January they brought the new born baby gifts of Gold, Myrrh, and Frankincense.

United Nations Day: October 24

Marks the anniversary of the U.N. Charter ratified in 1945.

Vaisakhi:

Sikh Observance

Anniversary of the creation of the Khalsa (the army of the Pure Ones) in 1699).

Valentines Day: February 14

FEBRUARY 14, 270 AD is recorded in Roman Catholic history as the day Christian priest Valentine was martyred for his refusal to denounce the Christian faith. His refusal, which he put in writing, is considered to be the "first Valentine".

Vasant Panchami (Sri Pancami):

Hindu Observance

Advent of spring; sacred to Saraswati, goddess of learning.

Wesak: April 8

Buddhist Observance

The anniversary of Buddah's birthday in the Mahayana tradition; the commemoration of Buddah's birth, enlightenment, and death, celebrated on the day of the full moon of the 6th month in the Theravada tradition.

Yom Hashoah:

Jewish Observance

Holocaust Remembrance Day. Memorializes the six million Jews who died in the Holocaust and emphasizes respect for human dignity; observance not limited to Jews.

Yom Kippur:

Jewish Observance

Jewish day of atonement; most solemn Jewish holy day, devoted to prayer, fasting and repentance.

Yule:

"Yule" and "Yuletide" have come to mean the Christmas season, but the actual origin of the word has not been established. Germanic tribes known as the Goths used the words "quil, huil, and jul" to represent wheel, and it is supposed the Yule refers to the belief that the sun revolved around the Earth.

Many present day Christmas customs were originally pagan. The burning of candles and the "Yule-log" were meant to symbolize the rebirth and the return of the sun. The decoration of the household with greenery, such as Holly and Evergreen symbolize life and rebirth because they stay green while other trees are bare.