



food+body wisdom

## Cultural and Religious Holidays Around the World

### Winter



#### Hanukkah

For eight days each November or December, Jews light a special candleholder called a menorah. They do it to remember an ancient miracle in which one day's worth of oil burned for eight days in their temple. On Hanukkah, many Jews also eat special potato pancakes called latkes, sing songs, and spin a top called a dreidel to win chocolate coins, nuts, or raisins.



#### St. Lucia Day

To honor this third-century saint on December 13, many girls in Sweden dress up as "Lucia brides" in long white gowns with red sashes, and a wreath of burning candles on their heads. They wake up their families by singing songs and bringing them coffee and twisted saffron buns called "Lucia cats."



#### Christmas

People celebrate this Christian holiday by going to church, giving gifts, and sharing the day with their families. In some parts of Europe, "star singers" go caroling — singing special Christmas songs — as they walk behind a huge star on a pole. Turkey, Ham, stuffing, cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes, sweet sugar cookies, and gingerbread treats are common meal in the United States for this holiday.



#### Kwanzaa

Kwanzaa, which means "First Fruits," is based on ancient African harvest festivals and celebrates ideals such as family life and unity. During this spiritual holiday, celebrated from December 26 to January 1, millions of African Americans dress in special clothes, decorate their homes with fruits and vegetables, and light a candleholder called a Kinara. Celebrants enjoy traditional African dishes as well as those featuring ingredients Africans brought to the United States such as sesame seeds, peanuts, sweet potatoes, collard greens, and spicy sauces.



#### Chinese New Year

Many Chinese children dress in new clothes to celebrate Chinese New Year. People carry lanterns and join in a huge parade led by a silk dragon, the Chinese symbol of strength. According to legend, the dragon hibernates most of the year, so people throw firecrackers to keep the dragon awake. Foods traditionally eaten during Chinese New Year are fish, dumplings, spring rolls, sweet rice balls, and specific fruit such as oranges and tangerines that symbolize good luck.



#### New Year

In Ecuador, families dress a straw man in old clothes on December 31. The straw man represents the old year. The family members make a will for the straw man that lists all of their faults. At midnight, they burn the straw man, in hopes that their faults will disappear with him. Eating 12 grapes at midnight is said to bring good luck for the coming year.



### **Mardi Gras**

The time of Lent is a solemn one of reflection for Christians, so the Tuesday before Lent begins is a time of merry-making for many people around the world. In New Orleans, people wear costumes and attend huge parades for the festival of Mardi Gras. Brazil's Carnaval also features parades, costumes, and music. This day is also known as Shrove Tuesday. In England, some towns have pancake contests in which women run a race while flipping a pancake at least three times. Several Creole and Cajon dishes are traditionally eaten during Mardi Gras along with foods that are considered "indulgent" due to preparing for Lenten fasting.

## **Spring**



### **Basant**

In Pakistan, boys celebrate the first day of spring in the Muslim calendar with exciting kite-fighting contests. After putting powdered glass on their strings, they use the strings to try to cut off each other's kites. Whoever keeps his kite the longest wins. Traditional Indian sweets such as Gajar Ka Halwa which is made with grated carrot, condensed milk, nuts and golden varq are commonly eaten during the celebration.



### **Holi**

For this Hindu spring festival, people dress in green. Children then squirt each other with water pistols filled with yellow- or red-colored liquid. They also blow colored powder on each other through bamboo pipes. Everyone gets soaked — and colorful — to celebrate spring. A sweet buttery flatbread called Puran Poli along with Thandai, a creamy milk drink can be found at this festival.



### **Songkran**

In Thailand, a special three-day water festival on April 13-15 marks Songkran, the Buddhists' celebration of the new year. Parades feature huge statues of Buddha that spray water on passersby. In small villages, young people throw water at each other for fun. People also release fish into rivers as an act of kindness. Pad Thai, Papaya salad, Tom Yam Goong, and green curry are all popular dishes during this time.



### **Aboakyere**

The Effutu people of Ghana make a special offer to the god Panche Otu each spring with the deer-hunting festival. Two teams of men and boys, dressed in bright costumes, compete to be the first to bring back a live deer to present to the chief. Then they all dance together.



### **Easter**

On Easter, Christians celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. People attend church and also enjoy different Easter customs. In Germany, people make "egg trees" that are decorated like Christmas trees. In Hungary, boys sprinkle girls with perfumed water — and in return, girls prepare a holiday dinner for them. In Hungary smoked ham with hard-boiled eggs, fresh milk-loaf, and pickled horseradish make up the festive dinner



### **Passover**

The highlight of this major Jewish holiday is the Passover Seder. During these two special dinners, families read from a book called the Haggadah about the ancient Israelites' exodus, or flight, from Egypt more than 3,000 years ago. As they honor their ancestors, Jews reaffirm the importance of freedom. The traditional plate during these meals consists of these six parts: Z'roa: A lamb shank, Beitzah: an egg, Maror: Bitter herbs such as horseradish, Karpas: A non-bitter vegetable, Haroset: A mixture of apple, nuts and wine and Hazeret: Another bitter herb, such as romaine lettuce

## **Summer**



### **Midsummer Day**

The sun continues to shine long after midnight in Scandinavia when Midsummer Day is celebrated in late June. To celebrate, Swedish villagers decorate a spruce trunk — called a najstang — like a maypole. In Norway, families light bonfires along the fjords. A typical Midsummer menu features different kinds of pickled herring, boiled new potatoes with fresh dill, soured cream and chives. This is often followed by a grilled dish of some kind, such as spare rib or salmon, and for dessert the first strawberries of summer, with cream.



### **O-Bon**

Japanese people keep the memory of their ancestors alive with a festival held during the summer called O-Bon. People put lit candles in lanterns and float them on rivers and seas. They also visit and clean the graves of those who have died. In the ancient city of Kyoto, people light giant bonfires. Fried Octopus and Squid can be found at this celebration.



### **Arapaho Sun Dance**

A religious festival centering on the sun dance takes place during summer in Wyoming. Cheyenne, Arapaho, Shoshone, and members of other Plains Indians tribes dance around a pole topped by a buffalo's head. The buffalo is a symbol of plenty, and dancers wish for good fortune in the year ahead.



### **Ramadan**

During this holy time, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar year, Muslims do not eat, drink, or smoke from sunrise to sunset for an entire month. Instead, they spend their days in worship, praying in mosques. At the end of Ramadan, people celebrate with a festival known as Id-ul-Fitr.

# Autumn



## Day of the Dead

On November 1 — called Día de Los Muertos — Mexicans remember their loved ones who have died by visiting them and having a meal right in the graveyard. Stores sell sugar-candy caskets, breads decorated with "bone" shapes, and toy skeletons.

## Labor Day



In 66 countries, the contributions of workers are honored on Labor Day. In New Zealand, Labor Day is marked on the fourth Monday of October and celebrates the campaign for the eight-hour workday. Now, New Zealanders have an extra day of rest from work — and a three-day weekend for picnics and other activities.

## Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur



In September or October, Jews believe that God opens the Book of Life for ten days, starting with Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year) and ending with Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement). During these days, the holiest in the Jewish year, Jews try to atone for any wrongdoing and to forgive others. A ram's horn trumpet, known as the shofar, is blown before and during Rosh Hashanah and at the conclusion of Yom Kippur. Typical meals during this time include bagels with smoked fish and cream cheese, baked casserole-style dishes like strata and kugel, blintzes, and assorted cookies and cakes.

## Halloween



Evolving from the ancient Celtic holiday of Samhain, modern Halloween has become less about literal ghosts and ghouls and more about costumes and candy. The Celts used the day to mark the end of the harvest season and the beginning of winter, and also believed that this transition between the seasons was a bridge to the world of the dead. Over the millennia the holiday transitioned from a somber pagan ritual to a day of merriment, costumes, parades and sweet treats for children and adults

## Thanksgiving



Each year on the fourth Thursday in November, Americans gather for a day of feasting, football and family. While today's Thanksgiving celebrations would likely be unrecognizable to attendees of the original 1621 harvest meal, it continues to be a day for Americans to come together around the table.

Information adapted from the following websites:

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