

# Interfaith Calendar Holiday Descriptions

July 2012 - June 2013

Major religious holidays for Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism

Link to Interfaith calendar: <http://www.interfaithcalendar.org/2012.htm>

## **Buddhism**

**Asalha Puja Day:** July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012

**Holiday description:** Asalha Puja Day, also known as Dhamma Day, is one of the most sacred days in Buddhism and celebrates the first teaching of the Buddha. The festival is celebrated on the full moon day of the 8th lunar month, Asalha, of the old Indian calendar. Asalha also marks the starting of the monsoon. During this period the Buddha and his monks and nuns would hold their wanderings. Even today, monasteries keep a three month long 'rains retreat' which commences on Dhamma day and concludes on Pavarana.

Dhamma Day is usually celebrated with readings from the Buddhist scriptures, and is an opportunity to reflect deeply on one's content, purify one's spirit and maintain peacefulness. If an individual practices Buddhism within a monastic tradition, Dhamma Day is, wherever possible, celebrated in a temple, Buddhist centre or monastery in the presence of monks or nuns.

**For more information on Asalha Puja Day:**

[http://en.m-culture.go.th/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=34:asalha-puja-day&catid=30:the-important-days-in-thailand&Itemid=40](http://en.m-culture.go.th/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=34:asalha-puja-day&catid=30:the-important-days-in-thailand&Itemid=40)

**Obon:** July 13<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup>, 2012

**Holiday Description:** Obon, also referred to as The Festival of the Souls, is one of the most important Japanese traditions. Obon was originally celebrated around the 15th day of the seventh month in the lunar calendar. Obon periods are nowadays different in various regions of Japan. Therefore Obon is celebrated in some regions around August 15<sup>th</sup> and other regions around July 15<sup>th</sup>. During Obon people believe that their ancestors' spirits come back to their homes to be reunited with their family. This is the time when people can pray for the spirits to guide and help their ancestors' spirits to find peace.

During this festival period of 3 days, families hang lanterns outside their homes and beside the graves to welcome the souls home. Japanese people also clean their homes and place a variety of food offerings such as vegetables and fruits in front of a butsudan (Buddhist altar) for their ancestors' spirits. Chochin lanterns and flower arrangements are also usually placed by the butsudan. During this period people also gather for outdoor dances known as Bon dance.

**For information on Obon:** <http://gojapan.about.com/cs/japanesefestivals/a/obonfestival.htm>

**Chinese New Year:** February 3, 2013

**Holiday Description:** The Chinese New Year is the longest and most important celebration in the

Chinese calendar. New Year festivities traditionally start on the first day of the month and continue until the fifteenth, when the moon is the brightest. In China, people may take weeks of holiday from work to prepare for and celebrate the New Year.

At Chinese New Year celebrations people wear red clothes, decorate with poems on red paper, and give children "lucky money" in red envelopes. Red symbolizes fire, which according to legend can drive away bad luck. The fireworks that shower the festivities are rooted in a similar ancient custom. In China, the New Year is also a time of family reunion. Family members gather at each other's homes for visits and shared meals, most significantly a feast on New Year's Eve. There is also the lantern festival which is held on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month. Some of the lanterns may be works of art, painted with birds, animals, flowers, zodiac signs, and scenes from legend and history. In many areas, the highlight of the lantern festival is the dragon dance. Traditionally the dragon is held aloft by young men who dance as they guide the colorful beast through the streets.

**For more information on the Chinese New Year:** <http://www.infoplease.com/spot/chinesenewyear1.html>

**Magha Puja Day:** March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2013

**Holiday Description:** Magha Puja Day, also called Sangha Day or Fourfold Assembly Day, in most countries is observed on the first full moon day of March. The day commemorates a time when 1,250 enlightened monks, disciples of the Buddha, spontaneously came together to pay respect to the Buddha. This festival honors the Sangha, or the Buddhist community and offers a chance to the people to reaffirm their faith and commitment to Buddhist practices and traditions. The Sangha or the spiritual community is extremely important in Buddhism because it is one of the three jewels of Buddhism apart from the Buddha and the Dhamma.

This festival is a chance for the community to come together and carry out meetings to discuss various aspects of the Buddha's teaching, indulge in group meditation and listen to talks given by senior members of the community. People sometimes gather at temples, usually in the morning, bringing with them offerings of food and other items for the monastics. Magha Puja observations usually feature processions, sometimes by candlelight. Observers walk around a shrine, Buddha image or through a temple three times, once for each of the Three Jewels – The Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha.

**For more information on Magha Puja Day:** <http://buddhism.about.com/od/buddhistholidays/a/maghapuja.htm>

**Visakha Puja Day:** May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2013

**Holiday Description:** Visakha Puja Day, also known as Buddha day, is the holiest day for Buddhists and is celebrated by Buddhist communities all over the world. Visakha Puja Day marks the three important incidents in the life of the Lord Buddha on the same day – the Buddha's birth, the enlightenment of the Buddha and the Nibbana (death) of the Buddha.

On Visakha Puja Day all Buddhists throughout the world gather together to perform the worship to recollect the wisdom, purity and compassion of the Buddha. Activities include going to temples for special observations, making merit, listening to Dhamma preaching, giving some donations and joining in other Buddhist activities. Much of the Buddhist community will also choose to abstain from alcoholic drinks and all other kinds of immoral acts, offer food to the monks and novices and attend the candle light procession around the Uposatha Hall, in the evening of the first day.

**For more information on Visakha Puja Day:** <http://www2.tat.or.th/visakhapuja/eng/about.html>

## **Christianity**

**Christmas:** December 25, 2012

**Holiday Description:** Christmas is both a sacred religious holiday and a world-wide cultural and commercial phenomenon. For two millennia, people around the world have been observing it with traditions and practices that are both religious and secular in nature. Christians celebrate Christmas Day as the anniversary of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, a spiritual leader whose teachings form the basis of their religion.

Popular customs include exchanging gifts, decorating Christmas trees, attending church, sharing meals with family and friends and, of course, waiting for Santa Claus to arrive.

**For more information on Christmas:** <http://www.history.com/topics/christmas>  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas>

**Good Friday:** March 29, 2013

**Holiday Description:** Good Friday is observed on the Friday before Easter Sunday. On this day Christians commemorate the passion, or suffering, and death on the cross of the Lord, Jesus Christ. Many Christians spend this day in fasting, prayer, repentance, and meditation on the agony and suffering of Christ on the cross.

**For more information on Good Friday:** <http://christianity.about.com/od/holidaytips/qt/whatisgoodfrida.htm>

**Easter:** March 31, 2013

**Holiday Description:** On Easter Sunday, Christians celebrate the resurrection of the Lord, Jesus Christ. It is typically the most well-attended Sunday service of the year for Christian churches. Christians believe, according to Scripture, that Jesus came back to life, or was raised from the dead, three days after his death on the cross. As part of the Easter season, the death of Jesus Christ by crucifixion is commemorated on Good Friday, always the Friday just before Easter. Through his death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus paid the penalty for sin, thus purchasing for all who believe in him, eternal life in Christ Jesus.

Easter customs vary across the Christian world, but attending sunrise services, exclaiming the Paschal greeting, clipping the church and decorating Easter eggs, a symbol of the empty tomb, are common motifs. Additional customs include egg hunting, the Easter Bunny, and Easter parades, which are observed by both Christians and some non-Christians.

**For more information on Easter:** <http://christianity.about.com/od/holidaytips/qt/whatiseseaster.htm>

**Pentecost:** May 19, 2013

**Holiday Description:** Pentecost is a Christian holy day commemorating the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the disciples of Jesus Christ, according to the New Testament of the Bible. It is also known as Whitsunday, or Whit Sunday. Pentecost, the Church's celebration of the gift of the Holy Spirit, comes from the realization that God's very life, breath and energy lives in, with and among us. Those who are Christians experience this life through Jesus because they see the Spirit so fully manifest in him. If you

attend church on Pentecost Sunday, you will most likely hear read a passage from John's Gospel (20:19-23). It tells of a visit of the Risen Christ to the disciples huddled in fear. "Peace be with you," Jesus says. "As the Father sent me, so I am sending you." After saying this, Jesus breathed on them and added, "Receive the Holy Spirit." The breath, the life, of Jesus himself. We are God-breathed. Pentecost celebrates that reality.

In the United States, Christians share their perspective about the meaning of Pentecost as well as how the diversity of languages and cultures can enhance their worship and fellowship with each another. Christians see Pentecost as an expansion of God's favor and care from Judaism to all peoples. Many churches celebrate Pentecost with a mass or worship service on this day.

**For more information on Pentecost:** <http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/us/pentecost>  
<http://www.explorefaith.org/questions/pentecost.html>

## **Hinduism**

**Krishna Janmashtami:** August 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup>, 2012

**Holiday Description:** Krishna Janmashtami is a celebration of the birth of Lord Sri Krishna, who Hindus consider to be their leader, hero, protector, philosopher, teacher and friend. The celebration is spread over two days, the first day is called Krishan ashtami or Gokul ashtami and the second day is called Kaal ashtami or Janam ashtami. During this celebration Hindus are likely to forego sleep and sing traditional Hindu songs. Because it is believed that Krishna was born at midnight, it is at this time that the true festivities begin. Food is prepared with milk and curds which are said to be some of Krishna's favorites and dances and songs are used to venerate and remember this supreme God. Some choose to fast the first 24 hours and only eat after the midnight celebrations. They also recite hymns from the gita, sing devotional songs and chant mantras.

**For more information on Krishna Janmashtami:**  
<http://hinduism.about.com/od/festivalsholidays/a/janmashtami.htm>

**Navaratri:** October 16-23, 2012

**Holiday Description:** Navaratri is a Hindu festival that honors the Mother Goddess in all her manifestations. Navaratri takes place at the beginning of October and lasts nine days. During Navaratri God is adored as Mother and Hindus invoke the energy aspect of God in the form of the universal mother, commonly referred to as "Durga". During this celebration Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati are worshipped as three different manifestations of Shakti or cosmic energy.

During Navaratri, some devotees of Durga observe a fast and prayers are offered for the protection of health and property – a period of introspection and purification. Navaratri is also traditionally an auspicious time for starting new ventures and communities get together for dances and nightly feasts. For women, Navaratri is a time for shopping for new clothes and new pots. It is an auspicious time to buy gold or jewellery and the gold markets are open late each night. Women dress elaborately each day for the puja or rituals and nightly dances. Another part of the puja may involve designing puja-thalis or aartis which are decorated plates in honour of the mother goddess, Amba (Ambika).

**For more information on Navaratri:** <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism/holydays/navaratri.shtml>

**Diwali:** November 13, 2012

**Holiday Description:** Diwali is one of the biggest festivals for Hindus, celebrated with great enthusiasm and happiness in India. The festival is celebrated for five continuous days, where the third day is celebrated as the main Diwali festival or 'Festival of lights'. The festival celebrates the victory of good over evil, light over darkness and knowledge over ignorance. For many the festival also honors Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth – lamps are lit to help Lakshmi find her way into people's homes. Many people start the new business year at Diwali and some Hindus will say prayers to the goddess for a successful year. They also celebrate one of the Diwali legends, which tells of the return of Rama and Sita to Rama's kingdom after fourteen years of exile.

Different colorful varieties of fireworks are always associated with this festival. On this auspicious day, people light up diyas and candles all around their homes. They perform Laxmi Puja in the evening and seek divine blessings from the Goddess of Wealth. The festival of Diwali is never complete without an exchange of gifts. People present Diwali gifts to all near and dear ones.

**For more information on Diwali:** <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/religion/hinduism/diwali.shtml>  
<http://www.diwalifestival.org/diwali-meaning-significance.html>

## **Islam**

**Ramadan:** July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2012

**Holiday Description:** Ramadan is celebrated on the ninth month of the Islamic Lunar calendar, when Muslims believe Allah revealed the first verse of the Qur'an, the holy book of Islam. During this sacred month Muslims from around the world spend the daylight hours fasting. Muslims use this time as a time for inner reflection, devotion to God and self-control. Fasting serves many purposes. While they are hungry and thirsty, Muslims are reminded of the suffering of the poor. Fasting is also an opportunity to practice self-control and to cleanse the body and mind. And in this most sacred month, fasting helps Muslims feel the peace that comes from spiritual devotion as well as kinship with fellow believers.

**For more information on Ramadan:** <http://www.factmonster.com/spot/ramadan1.html>  
<http://www.colostate.edu/orgs/MSA/events/Ramadan.html>

**Eid al-Fitr:** August 19<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup>, 2012

**Holiday Description:** Ramadan ends with the festival of Eid al-Fitr, one of the two most important Islamic celebrations. Eid al-Fitr is a three day celebration where people dress in their finest clothes, adorn their homes with lights and decorations, give treats to children, and enjoy visits with friends and family. On the day of Eid, Muslims gather early in the morning in outdoor locations or mosques to perform the Eid prayer. This consists of a sermon followed by a short congregational prayer. A sense of generosity and gratitude colors these festivities. Although charity and good deeds are always important in Islam, they have special significance at the end of Ramadan. As the month draws to a close, Muslims are obligated to share their blessings by feeding the poor and making contributions to mosques.

**For more information on Eid al-Fitr:** [http://islam.about.com/od/ramadan/f/eid\\_fitr.htm](http://islam.about.com/od/ramadan/f/eid_fitr.htm)

**Eid al-Adha:** October 26<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup>, 2012

**Holiday Description:** Eid al-Adha is celebrated at the end of Hajj (an annual pilgrimage to Mecca) and lasts for three days. During the celebration of Eid al-Adha, Muslims commemorate and remember

Abraham's trials. In some traditional Muslim countries families will slaughter an animal such as a sheep, camel, or goat as a sacrifice; however in most countries Muslims purchase a carcass from a butcher or buy generous portions of meat for a communal meal on Eid al-Adha. During Eid al-Adha many Muslims will also make a special effort to pray and listen to a sermon at a mosque, wear new clothes, and visit family members and friends. People also give money to enable poorer members of their local community and around the world to eat a meat-based meal.

For more information on Eid al-Adha: <http://islam.about.com/od/hajj/a/adha.htm>

## **Judaism**

**Rosh HaShanah:** September 17-18, 2012

**Holiday Description:** Rosh HaShanah is the Jewish New Year. It falls once a year during the month of Tishrei and occurs ten days before Yom Kippur. Together, Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur are known as the Yamim Nora'im, which means the Days of Awe in Hebrew. In English they are often referred to as the High Holy Days. Rosh HaShanah is observed on the first two days of Tishrei. Jewish tradition teaches that during the High Holy Days God decides who will live and who will die during the coming year. As a result, during Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur (and in the days leading up to them) Jews embark upon the serious task of examining their lives and repenting for any wrongs they have committed during the previous year. Jews are encouraged to make amends with anyone they have wronged and to make plans for improving during the coming year. In this way, Rosh HaShanah is all about making peace in the community and striving to be a better person, it is a holiday filled with hope for the New Year.

No work is permitted on Rosh HaShanah and much of the day is spent in the synagogue. An important symbol of Rosh HaShanah is the shofar, an instrument often made of ram's horn. It is blown one hundred times during each of the two days of Rosh HaShanah. The sound of the shofar blast reminds people of the importance of reflection during this important holiday. Other significant symbols of Rosh HaShanah include apples, honey and round loaves of challah. Apple slices dipped in honey represent hope for a sweet new year and are traditionally accompanied by a short prayer before eating. On the first day of Rosh HaShanah a ceremony called Tashlich takes place and symbolizes casting off the sins from the previous year. They do this by tossing pieces of bread or other food into a body of flowing water. On the second night of Rosh HaShanah it is customary to eat a fruit that is new for the season, pomegranate is a popular choice. Some people also choose to send New Year's greeting cards on Rosh HaShanah.

For more information on Rosh HaShanah: <http://judaism.about.com/od/holidays/a/roshhashanah.htm>  
<http://www.jewfaq.org/holiday2.htm>

**Yom Kippur:** September 26, 2012

**Holiday Description:** Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) is one of the two Jewish High Holy Days. The first High Holy Day is Rosh HaShanah (the Jewish New Year). Yom Kippur falls ten days after Rosh Hashanah on the 10th of Tishrei, which is a Hebrew month that correlates with September-October on the secular calendar. The purpose of Yom Kippur is to bring about reconciliation between people and

between individuals and God. According to Jewish tradition, it is also the day when God decides the fate of each human being. There are three essential components of Yom Kippur: Repentance, prayer and fasting.

During this period Jews are encouraged to seek out anyone they may have offended and to sincerely request forgiveness so that the New Year can begin with a clean slate. This process of repentance is called teshuvah and is a crucial part of Yom Kippur. On Yom Kippur the longest synagogue service in the Jewish year is held; here people spend time in deep prayer. Yom Kippur is also marked by 25 hours of fasting. The fast starts an hour before Yom Kippur begins and ends after nightfall on the day of Yom Kippur. In addition to food, Jews are also forbidden from engaging in sexual relations, bathing or wearing leather shoes. The prohibition against wearing leather comes from a reluctance to wear the skin of a slaughtered animal while asking God for mercy. It is also customary to wear white on the holiday, which symbolizes purity and calls to mind the promise that our sins shall be made as white as snow. Some people wear a kittel, the white robe in which the dead are buried.

**For more information on Yom Kippur:** <http://judaism.about.com/od/holidays/a/yomkippur.htm>  
<http://www.jewfaq.org/holiday4.htm>

**Pesach:** March 26<sup>th</sup> - April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2013

**Holiday Description:** Pesach, known as Passover in English, is one of the most commonly observed Jewish holidays, even by otherwise non-observant Jews. Pesach begins on the 15th day of the Jewish month of Nisan. The primary observances of Pesach are related to the Exodus from Egypt after generations of slavery.

Pesach lasts for eight days (seven days in Israel). The first two days and last two days of the holiday (first and last in Israel) are days on which no work is permitted. Work is permitted on the intermediate days. The day before Pesach is the Fast of the Firstborn, a minor fast for all firstborn males, commemorating the fact that the firstborn Jewish males in Egypt were not killed during the final plague. On the first night of Pesach (first two nights for traditional Jews outside Israel), there is a special family meal, called Seder, filled with ritual to remember the significance of the holiday. The main ritual observances of this holiday center around Seder; the prohibition of *chametz* (leaven); and the eating of matzah (an unleavened bread). On the eve of the fifteenth day of Nisan, many Jews read from a book called the *hagaddah*, meaning "telling," which contains the order of prayers, rituals, readings and songs for the Pesach Seder.

**For more information on Pesach:** <http://www.jewfaq.org/holidaya.htm> <http://www.jewfaq.org/holidaya.htm>