

2017 Diversity Holidays

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The world is rich with diversity, which is reflected in the observances celebrated by its various cultures and populations. Knowledge of the following diversity holidays and celebrations can enhance your workplace diversity and inclusion efforts.

January

January 5: Guru Gobind Singh Ji's birthday, the Tenth Guru of the Sikhs who initiated the Sikhs as the Khalsa (the pure ones), and is known as the Father of the Khalsa.

January 6: Epiphany recognizes the visit of the three wise men to the baby Jesus 12 days after his birth. The holiday is observed by both Eastern and Western churches.

January 6: Christmas for the Armenian Orthodox Christians who celebrate the birth of Jesus on Epiphany.(Armenians living in Israel celebrate Christmas on January 19.)

January 7: Christmas for Eastern Orthodox Christians, who celebrate Christmas 13 days later than other Christian churches, because they follow the Julian rather than the Gregorian version of the Western calendar.

January 14: Makar Sankranti is a major harvest festival celebrated in various parts of India.

January 15: World Religion Day is observed by those of the Baha'i faith to promote interfaith harmony and understanding. World Religion Day starts sundown of January 17.

January 16: Martin Luther King Day commemorates the birth of Martin Luther King, Jr., the recipient of the 1964 Nobel Peace Prize and an activist for non-violent social change until his assassination in 1968.

January 18-25: The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. During the week, Christians pray for unity between all churches of the Christian faith.

January 24-27: Mahayana New Year is celebrated on the first full-moon day in January by members of the Mahayana Buddhist branch.

January 26: Republic Day of India recognizes the date the Constitution of India came into law in 1950, replacing the Government of India Act of 1935. This day also coincides with India's 1930 declaration of independence.

January 27: The anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz death camp in 1945 and UN Holocaust Memorial Day, the Annual International Day of Commemoration to remember the victims of the Holocaust.

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January 28: Lunar New Year honors ancestors and is geared toward family celebrations. It takes place on the first day of the first month according to the Chinese calendar, whose months coordinate with the phases of the moon. It is widely celebrated in South East Asian countries.

January 28: Chinese New Year is one of the most sacred of all traditional Chinese holidays, Chinese New Year is a time of family reunion and celebration.

January 31: The birthday of Guru Har Rai, the seventh Sikh guru.

February

February is Black History Month in the United States and Canada. Since 1976, the month has been designated to remember the contributions of people of the African Diaspora.

February 1: National Freedom Day, which celebrates the signing of the 13th Amendment, which abolished slavery in 1865.

February 11: Lantern Festival is the first significant feast after Chinese New Year, so called because the most important activity during the night of the event is watching various wonderful Chinese lanterns

February 11: TuB'shevat is a Jewish holiday recognizing "The New Year of the Trees." It is celebrated on the fifteenth day of the Hebrew month of Shevat. In Israel, the flowering of the almond tree usually coincides with this holiday, which is observed by planting trees and eating dried fruits and nuts.

February 15: Nirvana Day, the commemoration of Buddha's death at the age of 80, when he reached the zenith of Nirvana. February 8 is an alternative date of observance.

February 20: President's Day is a federally recognized celebration of George Washington's birthday, as well as every president proceeding after Washington.

February 25: Maha Shivaratri, a Hindu holiday that honors Shiva, one of the Hindu deities.

February 26-29: Intercalary Days for people of the Baha'i faith. At this time, days are added to the Baha'i calendar to maintain their solar calendar. Intercalary days are observed with gift giving, special acts of charity, and preparation for the fasting that precedes the New Year.

February 27: Losar is the Tibetan Buddhist New Year, in which is a time of renewal through sacred and secular practices.

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February 28: Mardi Gras is the last day for Catholics to indulge—and often overindulge—before Ash Wednesday starts the sober weeks of fasting that come with Lent.

March

March is Women's History Month. Started in 1987, Women's History Month recognizes all women for their valuable contributions to history and society.

March is also National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month, which was established to increase awareness and understanding of issues affecting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

March is National Multiple Sclerosis Education and Awareness Month. It was established to raise public awareness of the autoimmune disease that affects the brain and spinal cord and assist those with multiple sclerosis in making informed decisions about their health care.

March 1: Ash Wednesday is the beginning of Lent in the Christian faith. As a display of atonement, ashes are marked on worshippers. Lent, which is observed during the seven weeks prior to Easter, is a time of reflection and preparation for the Holy Week and is observed by fasting, charitable giving, and worshipping.

March 1-19: This nineteen-day fast for members of the Baha'i Faith is meant to reinvigorate the soul and bring the person closer to God.

March 8: International Women's Day. First observed in 1911 in Germany, it has now become a major global celebration honoring women's economic, political, and social achievements.

March 11-12: Purim, a Jewish celebration that marks the time when the Jewish community living in Persia was saved from genocide. According to the Book of Esther, King Ahasuerus's political advisor planned to have all the Jews killed; however, his plot was foiled when Esther, one of the king's wives, revealed her Jewish identity. On Purim, Jewish people offer charity and share food with friends.

March 12: Magha Puja Day, a Buddhist holiday that marks an event early in the Buddha's teaching life when a group of 1,250 enlightened saints, ordained by the Buddha, gathered to pay their respect to him. March 23 is the Lord's Supper, a holiday celebrated by Jehovah's Witnesses. Once a year after sundown on Nisan 14, Jehovah's Witnesses observe the Lord's Evening Meal.

March 13: Holi, a Hindu and Sikh spring religious festival observed in India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, along with other countries that have large Hindu and Sikh populations. People celebrate Holi by

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throwing colored powder and water at each other. Bonfires are lit the day before in the memory of the miraculous escape that young Prahlad accomplished when Demoneess Holika carried him into the fire.

March 13 – April 15: Deaf History Month. This observance celebrates key events in deaf history, including the founding of Gallaudet University and the American School for the Deaf.

March 17: St. Patrick's Day, a holiday started in Ireland to recognize St. Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, who brought Christianity to the country in the early days of the faith.

March 20: The Bahá'í New Year or Naw-Rúz is a holiday celebrated on the vernal equinox. It is one of the nine Bahá'í holy days on which work is suspended.

March 20: Ostara/ Eostre, a celebration of the spring equinox on March 21. Commemorated by Pagans and Wiccans, it is observed as a time to mark the coming of spring and the fertility of the land.

April

April is Celebrate Diversity Month, started in 2004 to recognize and honor the diversity surrounding us all. By celebrating differences and similarities during this month, organizers hope that people will get a deeper understanding of each other.

April is Autism Awareness Month, established to raise awareness about the developmental disorder that affects children's normal development of social and communication skills.

April 2: World Autism Awareness Day, created to raise awareness of the developmental disorder around the globe.

April 5: Ram Navani is when Hindus worship and celebrate the seventh avatar of Vishnu (Lord Rama). Devotees typically wear red and place extravagant flowers on the shrine of the God.

April 9: Palm Sunday, a holiday recognized by Christians to commemorate the entry of Jesus in Jerusalem. It is the last Sunday of Lent and the beginning of the Holy Week.

April 11 - April 18: Passover is an eight-day festival in commemoration of the emancipation of the Israelites from slavery in ancient Egypt.

April 13: Holy Thursday (Maundy Thursday), which is the Christian holiday commemorating the Last Supper, at which Jesus and the Apostles were together for the last time before the Crucifixion. It is celebrated on the Thursday before Easter.

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April 14: Vaisakhi (also spelled Baisakhi) celebrates the founding of the Sikh community as the Khalsa (community of the initiated) and the birth of the Khalsa.

April 14: Good Friday is celebrated by Christians to commemorate the execution of Jesus by crucifixion, and is recognized on the Friday before Easter.

April 16: Easter, a holiday celebrated by Christians to recognize Jesus's return from death after the crucifixion.

April 21-May 2: The days during which members of the Bahai Faith celebrate the Festival of Ridvan, which commemorates the 12 days when Baha'u'llah, the prophet-founder, resided in a garden called Ridvan (Paradise) and publicly proclaimed His mission as God's messenger for this age.

April 21: the Day of Silence on which students take a daylong vow of silence to protest the actual silencing of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students and their straight allies due to bias and harassment.

April 22/April 23: Lailat-al-Miraj is a Muslim holiday that commemorates the Prophet Muhammad's night time journey from Mecca to the 'Farthest Mosque' in Jerusalem where he ascended to heaven, was purified, and given the instruction for Muslims to pray five times daily. Note that in the Muslim calendar, a holiday begins on the sunset of the previous day, so observing Muslims will celebrate Lailat al Miraj on the sunset of Saturday, the 22nd of April.

April 22: Earth Day promotes peace and sustainability of planet Earth, worldwide events are held to show support of environmental protection of the earth.

April 23 (Evening) - April 24 (Evening): Holocaust Remembrance Day is, in the words of former President Obama a time to "mourn the loss of lives, celebrate those who saved them, honor those who survived, and contemplate the obligations of the living" in regard to the genocide.

April 24: Armenian Martyrs' Day recognizes the genocide of some 1.5 million Armenians between 1915 and 1923 in Turkey.

May

May is Asian-American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month in the United States. The month of May was chosen to commemorate the immigration of the first Japanese to the United States on May 7, 1843, and to mark the anniversary of the completion of the transcontinental railroad on May 10, 1869. The majority of the workers who laid the tracks on the project were Chinese immigrants.

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May is also Older Americans Month, established in 1963 to honor the legacies and contributions of older Americans and to support them as they enter their next stage of life.

In addition, May is Jewish American Heritage month, which recognizes the diverse contributions of the Jewish people to American culture.

May 3: Buddha Day is a festival that marks Gautama Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death. It falls on the day of the full moon in May and it is a gazetted holiday in India.

May 5: Cinco de Mayo which commemorates the Mexican army's 1862 victory over France at the Battle of Puebla during the Franco-Mexican War (1861-1867). This day celebrates Mexican culture and heritage, including parades and mariachi music performances.

May 10/11 (Sunset): Lailat al Bara'a, also known as Barat, or Night of Forgiveness, is a time for sweets, time for charity, and most importantly, a time of focused prayer and worship.

May 15: Buddha Day (Vesak or Visakha Puja), which marks the occasion of the birth, spiritual awakening and death of the historical Buddha.

May 17: International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, a global celebration of sexual and gender diversities.

May 21: World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development, a day set aside by the United Nations as an opportunity to deepen our understanding of the values of cultural diversity and to learn to live together better.

May 27: Beginning of Ramadan marks when fasting begins. This is a time of great praise and worship through prayer and devotion to Islam.

May 29: Memorial Day in the United States. It is a federal holiday established to honor military veterans who died in wars fought by American forces.

June

June is Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Pride Month, established to recognize the impact that gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals have had on the world. LGBT groups celebrate this special time with pride parades, picnics, parties, memorials for those lost to hate crimes and HIV/AIDS, and other group gatherings. The last Sunday in June is Gay Pride Day.

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June 4: Pentecost is the celebration of the giving of the 10 Commandments by God at Mount Sinai.

June 14: Flag Day in the United States. This day is observed to celebrate the history and symbolism of the American flag.

June 15: Native American Citizenship Day. This observance commemorates the day in 1924 when the United States Congress passed legislation recognizing the citizenship of Native Americans.

June 16: Sikhs observe the Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev. Guru Arjan Dev was the fifth Sikh guru and the first Sikh martyr.

June 19: Juneteenth, also known as Freedom Day or Emancipation Day. It is observed as a public holiday in 14 U.S. states. This celebration honors the day in 1865 when slaves in Texas and Louisiana finally heard they were free, two months after the end of the Civil War. June 19, therefore, became the day of emancipation for thousands of Blacks.

June 21: Lailat-al-Qadir is the holiest night of the year for Muslims, and is traditionally celebrated on the 27th day of Ramadan. It is known as the “Night of Power,” and commemorates the night that the Quran was first revealed to the Prophet Muhammad

June 26-28: Eid-al-Fitr is the first day of the Islamic month of Shawwal. It marks the end of Ramadan, which is a month of fasting and prayer. Many Muslims attend communal prayers, listen to a khutba (sermon) and give zakat al-fitr (charity in the form of food) during Eid al-Fitr.

June 26: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) Pride Day in the United States. It celebrates the Stonewall Riots on June 28, 1969.

July

July 9: The Martyrdom of the Bab, Baha’is observe the anniversary of the Bab’s execution in Tabriz, Iran, in 1850.

July 11: World Population Day, an observance established in 1989 by the Governing Council of the United Nations Development Programme. The annual event is designed to raise awareness of global population issues.

July 15: Asalha Puja Day or Dharma Day is a celebration of Buddha’s first teachings.

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July 18: Nelson Mandela International Day, launched in recognition of Nelson Mandela's birthday on July 18, 2009 via unanimous decision of the UN General Assembly. It was inspired by a call Nelson Mandela made a year earlier, for the next generation to take on the burden of leadership in addressing the world's social injustices when he said "It is in your hands now". It is more than a celebration of "Madiba's" life and legacy. It is a global movement to honor his life's work and act to change the world for the better.

July 23: The birthday of Haile Selassie I, the Emperor of Ethiopia, who the Rastafarians consider to be God and their Savior.

July 24: Pioneer Day, observed by the Mormons to commemorate the arrival in 1847 of the first Latter Day Saints pioneer in Salt Lake Valley.

July 26: Disability Independence Day, which marks the anniversary of the 1990 signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

July 30: International Day of Friendship was proclaimed in 2011 by the UN General Assembly with the idea that friendship between peoples, countries, cultures and individuals can inspire peace efforts and build bridges between communities.

July 31 (Evening)- August 1: Tisha B'Av is a fast in commemoration of the destruction of two very holy and sacred temples of Judaism destroyed by the Babylonians (in 586 B.C.E) and Romans (in 70 E.C). At the of Tisha B'Av, after very select passages from the Torah are read and understood, netilat yadayim, or the washing of the hands, is performed.

August

August 6: Transfiguration, a holiday recognized by Orthodox Christians to celebrate when Jesus became radiant, and communed with Moses and Elijah on Mount Tabor. To celebrate, adherents have a feast.

August 7: Raksha Bandhan, a Hindu holiday commemorating the loving kinship between a brother and a sister. Raksha means protection in Hindi, and symbolizes the longing a sister has to be protected by her brother. During the celebration, a sister ties a string around her brother's (or brother-figure's) wrist, and asks him to protect her. The brother usually gives the sister a gift and agrees to protect her for life.

August 15: Krishna Janmashtami is a celebration of Lord Vishnu's most powerful human incarnations. The Hindu celebrations include praying and fasting.

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August 17: Marcus Garvey Day, which celebrates the birthday of the Jamaican politician and activist who is revered by Rastafarians. Garvey is credited with starting the Back to Africa movement, which encouraged those of African descent to return to the land of their ancestors during and after slavery in North America.

August 23: International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and the anniversary of the uprising in Santo Domingo (today Haiti and the Dominican Republic) that initiated the abolition of slavery in that nation.

August 25: Krishna Jayanti, the day Hindus celebrate Krishna's birthday, Vishnu's eighth incarnation on earth.

August 26 (Sunrise): Paryushana Parva is a Jain festival lasting about 8-10 days, and is observed through meditation and fasting. Its main focus is spiritual upliftment, pursuit of salvation and gaining a deeper understanding of the religion.

August 26: Women's Equality Day, which commemorates the August 26, 1920 certification of the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution that gave women the right to vote. Congresswoman Bella Abzug first introduced a proclamation for Women's Equality Day in 1971. Since that time, every president has published a proclamation recognizing August 26 as Women's Equality Day.

August 27: Celebration of Ganesha is a huge community event lasting around 10 days, where the elephant-headed Hindu God is praised and given offerings.

September

From September 15th to October 15th is [Hispanic Heritage Month](#). This month corresponds with Mexican Independence Day, which is celebrated on September 16, and recognizes the revolution in 1810 that ended Spanish dictatorship.

September 1-2 (Evening): Eid Al-Adha, Eid al-Adha is an Islamic festival to commemorate the willingness of Ibrahim (also known as Abraham) to follow Allah's (God's) command to sacrifice his son Ishmael. Muslims around the world observe this event.

September 4: Labor Day in the United States. Labor Day honors the contribution that laborers have made to the country and is observed on the first Monday of September.

September 5: Buddhist Ghost Festival aka Hungry Ghost Festival, Ancestral worship by those practicing Taoism, where street, market, and temple ceremonies take place.

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September 12: The Ethiopian New Year. Rastafarians celebrate the New Year on this date and believe that Ethiopia is their spiritual home.

September 15 – October 15: Hispanic Heritage Month. This month corresponds with Mexican Independence Day, which is celebrated on September 16, and recognizes the revolution in 1810 that ended Spanish dictatorship.

September 20-22 (Evening): Rosh-Hashanah is the Jewish New Year celebration, marking the creation of the world.

September 28: Teacher's Day. Taiwan uses this day to honor teachers' contributions to their students and to society in general. People often express their gratitude to their teachers by paying them a visit or sending them a card. This date was chosen to commemorate the birth of Confucius, the model master educator in ancient China.

September 29 - September 30: Yom Kippur is the holiest day on the Jewish calendar and is a day of atonement marked by fasting and ceremonial repentance.

October

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month. This observance was launched in 1945 when Congress declared the first week in October as "National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week." In 1998, the week was extended to a month and renamed. The annual event draws attention to employment barriers that still need to be addressed.

October is also LGBT History Month, a U.S. observance started in 1994 to recognize lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender history and the history of the gay rights movement.

October 1: Ashura, An Islamic holiday commemorating the day Noah left the ark and the day Allah saved Moses from the Egyptians.

October 4 - 11 (Evening): Jewish Holiday of Sukkot is a seven day festival giving thanks for the fall harvest.

October 9: Canadian Thanksgiving. It is a chance for people to give thanks for a good harvest and other fortunes in the past year.

October 9: National Indigenous People's Day is an alternative celebration to Columbus Day, promoting political correctness in giving recognition to the indigenous populations affected by colonization.

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October 11 - 12 (Evening): Shemini Atzeret is the day after the Sukkot festival where gratitude for the fall harvest is deeply internalized.

October 11: National Coming Out Day. For those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, this day celebrates coming out and the recognition of the 1987 march on Washington for gay and lesbian equality.

October 12-13 (Evening): Simchat Torah marks the end of the weekly readings of the Torah. The holy book is read from chapter one of Genesis, to Deuteronomy 34, then back to chapter one again, in acknowledgement of the words of the Torah being a circle; a never ending cycle.

October 19: The Diwali, Hindu, Jain and Sikh five-day festival of lights celebrates new beginnings and the triumph of good over evil, lightness over darkness.

October 20: The day Sikhs celebrate Sri Guru Granth Sahib who is their spiritual guide.

October 20: The Birth of the Bab, a holiday celebrated by the Baha'i recognizing the birth of the founder of the Baha'i faith. This celebration starts on October 19 and ends October 20.

October 22 marks the beginning of Dussehra (Dasera), a ten-day festival celebrated by Hindus to recognize Rama's victory over evil.

October 23: Ashura, a holiday recognized by Muslims to mark the martyrdom of Hussain. It also commemorates the day Noah left the ark and Moses was saved from the Egyptians by God.

October 24: Shemini Atzeret, "The Eighth (Day) of Assembly", which is the observed on the day following Sukkot.

November

November is [National Native American Heritage Month](#), which celebrates the history and contributions of Native Americans.

November 1: All Saints Day, which commemorates all known and unknown Christian saints. (In Eastern Christianity, the day is observed on the first Sunday after Pentecost.)

November 2: All Souls Day, which commemorates all faithful Christians who are now dead. In the Mexican tradition, the holiday is celebrated as Dia de los Muertos (October 31 and November 2), which is a time of remembrance for dead ancestors and a celebration of the continuity of life.

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November 11: Veterans Day, an annual U.S. federal holiday honoring military veterans. The date is also celebrated as Armistice Day or Remembrance Day in other parts of the world and commemorates the ending of the first World War in 1918.

November 12: The Birth of Baha'u'llah, a day on which members of the Baha'i faith celebrate the birthday of the founder of the Baha'i religion.

November 20: Transgender Day of Remembrance, established in 1998 to memorialize those who have been killed as a result of transphobia, and to raise awareness of the continued violence endured by the transgender community.

November 26: Feast of Christ of King, Praisal to God for the gift of time. Many party and feast to give thanks.

November 29 - 30: Eid Milad Un Nabi is the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday. Parades, communal feasts in mosques, night-long prayers, and many other celebrations take place and is mainly celebrated by Muslims in India

December

December 1: World AIDS Day, which was created to commemorate those who have died of AIDS, and to acknowledge the need for a continued commitment to all those affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

December 3: International Day of Disabled Persons, which is designed to raise awareness in regards to persons with disabilities in order to improve their lives and provide them with equal opportunity.

December 3 - 24: Advent, Joyous preparation for the annual festive remembrance of the incarnation of Christ's birth. Wreaths and Advent calendars are hung, Jesse trees are pitched, and it is a time of prayer.

December 8: Bodhi Day, a holiday observed by Buddhists to commemorate Gautama's enlightenment under the Bodhi tree at Bodhgaya, India.

December 10: International Human Rights Day, established by the United Nations in 1948 to commemorate the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

December 12: Feast Day at Our Lady of Guadalupe. This day commemorates the appearance of the Virgin Mary near Mexico City in 1531.

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December 12: Eid Milad Un Nabi, an Islamic holiday commemorating the birthday of the prophet Muhammad. During this celebration, homes and mosques are decorated, large parades take place, and those observing the holiday participate in charity events.

December 12-20: Hanukkah is celebrated around the world for eight days and nights. Hanukkah celebrates the victory of the Maccabees or Israelites over the Greek-Syrian ruler, Antiochus about 2200 years ago. A Menorah is a special nine-branched candelabrum.

December 13: St. Lucia's Day. In Sweden, St Lucia was a young Christian girl who was martyred, killed for her faith, in 304 AD. She secretly brought food to persecuted Christians in Rome. She wore candles on her head so she had both her hands free to carry things. These stories were told by the Monks who brought Christmas to Sweden.

December 16-24: Las Posadas, a nine-day celebration in Mexico commemorating the trials Mary and Joseph endured during their journey to Bethlehem.

December 21: The Winter Solstice/ Yule. For Pagans and Wiccans, the shortest day of the year represents a celebration focusing on rebirth, renewal, and new beginnings as the sun makes way back to the earth. A solstice is an astronomical event that happens twice each year when the Sun reaches its highest position in the sky.

December 25: Christmas, the day that Christians associate with Jesus's birth.

December 26 – January 1: Kwanzaa, an African-American holiday started by Maulana Karenga in 1966 to celebrate universal African-American heritage.