Holidays Around the World

All across the globe, celebrations are happening that involve customs, traditions, and festivities marking time-honored events and special days. Several of these events are celebrated by many worldwide. You may find some happening right here in your hometown. Let’s take a look at what different cultures, countries and religions celebrate!

**Diwali**, celebrated in October or November, is a Hindu festival held in honor of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. The celebration involves the lighting of lamps in homes and temples, and with prayers to Lakshmi.

If you find yourself in Mexico, Day of the Dead is a holiday celebrated there, as well as by Latin Americans living in the United States and Canada. The holiday focuses on family and friends gathering to pray for and remember family members who have died. The celebration occurs in connection with the Catholic holiday of All Saints’ Day (November 1) and All Souls’ Day (November 2). Traditions include visiting the graves with gifts of sugar skulls, marigolds, and the favorite foods of the departed. The origins of the modern holiday trace back to indigenous observances of the Aztec dating back thousands of years.

The well-known celebration of Hanukkah, also known as the Festival of Lights, is an eight-day Jewish holiday commemorating the rededication of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem at the time of the Maccabean Revolt in the 2nd Century. Hanukkah is observed for eight nights, and may occur from late November to late December. The festival is observed by the kindling of lights on a special candelabrum, the nine-branched Menorah or Hanukiah, one light on each night of the holiday, progressing to eight on the final night.

Unlike holidays steeped in centuries-old traditions, Kwanzaa, the African-American year-end feast, was not established until 1966 by Maulana Karenga. The celebration, which occurs annually from December 26 to January 1, is based on a compilation of several harvest festivals and celebrations from around the African continent. Each day of the week-long festival is devoted to the celebration of one of the seven principle building blocks of self-awareness. During the holiday week most Kwanzaa celebrants use a menu of traditional African-American dishes, as well as foods from the “mother continent.” The word “Kwanzaa” comes from the Swahili expression “matunda ya kwanza,” meaning “first fruits of the harvest.” The holiday today has become a rapidly growing tradition with over 18 million people in all walks of life celebrating the week as a time of feasting, fasting, and self-examination.

For followers of Islam, Ramadan is the month of fasting, in which participating Muslims refrain from eating, drinking, smoking, and indulging in anything that is in excess or ill-natured, from dawn until sunset. The fasting is meant to teach the Muslim patience, modesty, and spirituality. During Ramadan, Muslims ask forgiveness for past sins, pray for guidance and help in refraining from everyday evils, and try to purify themselves through self-restraint and good deeds.

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The holiday season is full of culture and tradition. Whatever you celebrate, there is plenty of information available in our databases at PPLD to help educate your youngsters on all kinds of cultures.

Start at the Kids Web and click on Homework Help. Choose the Kid's Databases option from the left hand side. You will find tools to help young students learn more about different cultures, holidays, and traditions. By choosing the World Edition you will have access to over 200 reports on countries and cultures, and state reports outlining the diversity and history of each U.S. state and the District of Columbia. Choosing the will give you an interactive map. By clicking on any country on the map you can learn more about that country and its culture.

Next, choose Junior Worldmark Encyclopedia of World Holidays from the Kids' Database page. You will find in-depth information on world holidays. For example by doing a simple search of "United States," many informative articles will come up giving information about the many holidays that we celebrate here in the U.S. Maybe you are looking for a fun twist on culture. Foods and Recipes of the World from the Kids' Database page. This database provides many different texts available on different countries and their type of cookies. You are bound to have fun searching for your particular spices.

Christmas Day is an annual holiday commemorating the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. The day marks the beginning of a larger season, Christmastide which lasts 12 days. Though Christmas is observed on December 25, it is not known if this is the actual date of birth or chosen to correspond with either the earlier Roman festivals or the winter solstice. Celebrated throughout the Christian population, it is also celebrated as a secular, cultural, gift-giving festival, associated with popular elements from Nordic traditions like the Christmas tree, mistletoe, holly, and the figure of Santa Claus.

Saint Nicholas Day, honoring the Patron saint and Bishop Nicholas of Myra, is celebrated on December 6 by the Catholic and Orthodox Christians and various Angelican and Lutheran churches throughout parts of Greece, Belgium, Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, Russia, Slovakia, and Serbia. His day is also celebrated by secret-giving, such as putting coins in the shoes of those who left them out for him, became the model for Santa Claus, whose English name comes from the Dutch "Sinterklaas".

New Year’s Day, a world-wide celebration of the first day of the New Year is celebrated on January 1, as it was also in ancient Rome (though other dates were also used in Rome). It is a public holiday, offering reflection of the passing year, created resolutions for the upcoming year, and often celebrated with fireworks at the stroke of midnight as the new year starts. Some of the Eastern Orthodox churches celebrate the New Year on January 14 in correspondence to the Julian calendar.

Whatever you choose to celebrate, there are ancestral, historical, and spiritual meanings you can learn from.