



# 2015 DIVERSITY HOLIDAYS

**The United States 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.

**(Please note: All dates are for 2015.)**

# JANUARY

**January 4:** 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.

**January 6:** Epiphany, a holiday recognizing 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 14:** Makar Sankranti, a major harvest festival celebrated in various parts of India.

**January 5:** Mahayana New Year celebrated on the first full-moon day in January by members of the Mahayana Buddhist branch.

**January 17 (Sunset) - January 18:** World Religion Day. This 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 18 - January 25:** The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, when the week, Christians pray for unity between all churches of the Christian faith.

**January 19:** Martin Luther King Day, commemorating the birth of Martin Luther King, Jr., (Recipient of the 1964 Nobel Peace Prize and an activist for non-violent social change until his assassination in 1968)

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

**January 31:** 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 3 (sunset) - February 4 (sunset):** TuB'shvat, a Jewish holiday recognizing "The New Year of the Trees." 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 8:** Nirvana Day, the commemoration of Buddha's death at the age of 80, when he reached the zenith of Nirvana. Alternative date of observance: February 15.

**February 16:** President's Day, originally established to honor Presidents Washington and Lincoln, but now serving as a reminder of the contributions of all U.S. presidents.

**February 17:** Maha Shivaratri, a Hindu holiday that honors Shiva. (One of the Hindu deities)

**February 17:** Mardi Gras, also known as Fat Tuesday or Shrove Tuesday. Last day of feasting before Lent begins on Ash Wednesday.

**February 18:** Ash Wednesday, 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.

**February 19 - 21:** Losar, the Tibetan Buddhist New Year. Losar, which means new year in Tibetan, is considered the most important holiday in Tibet.

**February 19:** The start of the Asian Lunar New Year, celebrated by many Asian groups including Chinese, Vietnamese, and Koreans. 2015 is the Year of the Wooden Horse/Sheep/ Goat.

**February 19 - March 5:** Chinese New Year. Chinese New Year is the most important holiday in the Chinese lunisolar calendar and is recognized by gift giving, parades, decorations, and feasting. The celebration culminates with the Lantern Festival on March 5.

**February 26 - March 1:** 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.

# MARCH

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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 4 (sunset) - March 5 (sunset):** 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 5:** 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 6:** 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 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 Demoness Holika carried him into the fire.

**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 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:** 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.

**March 28:** Ram Navami, a Hindu festival commemorating the birth of Lord Rama, a popular deity in Hinduism. People celebrate the holiday by sharing stories and visiting temples.

**March 29:** 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

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

**April 3 (sunset) - April 11 (sunset):** Passover, a Jewish holiday celebrated each spring in remembrance of the Jews' deliverance out of slavery in Egypt in 1300 B.C. On the first two days of Passover, a traditional Seder is eaten and the story of deliverance is shared.

**April 5:** Easter, a holiday celebrated by Christians to recognize Jesus' return from death after the crucifixion. It is considered to be the most important Christian holiday.

**April 29:** 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.

# 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.

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.

**May 5:** Cinco de Mayo, commemorating 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 16:** Lailat al Miraj. On this day, Muslims celebrate Prophet Muhammad's night journey from Makkah to Jerusalem and his ascension to heaven.

**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 24:** Pentecost. Pentecost Sunday, which marks the end of the Easter season in the Christian calendar, celebrates the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles. Pentecost 2015 falls 50 days after Easter 2015.

# 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. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual 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.

**June 1:** Lailat al Bara'a, celebrated as the night of forgiveness by Muslims.

**June 4:** Corpus Christi, a Catholic celebration in honor of the Eucharist.

**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 18:** Islamic month of fasting. Muslims abstain from eating, drinking, and sexual activity from dawn until sunset, in efforts to teach patience, modesty, and spirituality. This year, the observance lasts until July 17.

**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 28:** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) Pride Day in the United States.

# JULY

**July 9:** 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 12:** Asala-Dharma Day, which celebrates the anniversary of the start of the Buddha's teaching.

**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 that "it is in your hands now". It is more than a celebration of Mandela's life and legacy. It is a global movement to honour his life's work and act to change the world for the better.

**July 18:** Eid al Fitr, the Muslim celebration commemorating the ending of Ramadan. It is a festival of thanksgiving to Allah for enjoying the month of Ramadan and involves wearing one's finest clothing, saying prayers, and nurturing understanding of other religions.

**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 25 (sunset) - July 26 (sunset):** Tisha B' Av, an annual fasting day, observed to commemorate the tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people.

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



# 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 9:** International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples. The focus this year is "Indigenous peoples building alliances: Honoring treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements."

**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 26:** Women's Equality Day, which commemorates the August 26, 1920 certification of the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution, which 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 29:** 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.

# SEPTEMBER

**September 5:** Janmashtami, a Hindu holiday recognizing Krishna's birthday. Krishna is the highest god in the Hindu faith.

**September 12:** Ethiopian New Year. Rastafarians celebrate the New Year on this date and believe that Ethiopia is their spiritual home, a place they desire to return to.

**September 13 (sunset) - September 15 (nightfall):** Rosh Hashanah, a holiday recognizing the Jewish New Year. It is the first of the Jewish High Holy Days, and is marked by abstinence, prayer, repentance, and rest.

**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 18:** Paryushana Parva, the most revered Jain festival comprising eight or ten days of fasting and repentance.

**September 22 (sunset) - September 23 (sunset):** Yom Kippur. This holiday is the holiest day on the Jewish calendar and is a day of atonement marked by fasting and ceremonial repentance.

**September 27 (sunset) - October 4 (sunset):** Jewish holiday of Sukkot. It is a time of remembrance of the fragile tabernacles that Israelites lived in as they wandered the wilderness for 40 years. The first day of the holiday is celebrated with prayers and special meals.

**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

# 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 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.

**Second Monday in October (October 12):** National Indigenous People’s Day, which recognizes 500 years of resistance and the continued existence of North American Indigenous people. This is celebrated in lieu of Columbus Day.

**October 22:** The beginning of Dussehra (Dasera), a ten day festival celebrated by Hindus to recognize Rama’s victory over evil.

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

# NOVEMBER

November is National Native American Heritage Month, which celebrates the history and contributions of Native Americans.

**November 1:** All Saints Day. All Saints Day celebrates the lives of all Christians who have died in a state of grace.

**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 11:** The beginning of Diwali (the festival of lights), celebrated by Sikhs, Hindus, and Jains. The holiday is observed with decorating homes with lights and candles, setting off fireworks, and distributing sweets and gifts.

**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 raise awareness of the continued violence endured by the transgender community.

**November 22:** Feast of Christ the King, the last holy Sunday in the western liturgical calendar. This day is observed by the Roman Catholic Church, as well as many Anglicans, Lutherans, and other mainline Protestants.

# 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 6 (sunset) - December 14 (sunset):** Hanukkah (Chanukah). Also known as the Festival of Lights, it is an eight-day Jewish holiday recognizing the rededication of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. It is observed by lighting candles on a Menorah—one for each day of the festival.

**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.

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

**December 22:** The Winter Solstice/ Yule. For Pagans and Wiccans, the shortest day of the year represents 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' birth.

**December 26 - January 1:** Kwanzaa, an African-American holiday started by Maulana Karenga in 1966 to celebrate universal African-American heritage. It is observed by lighting candles to represent each of the holiday's seven principles, libations, feasting, and gift giving.