

## Key Religious Holidays

### Judaism

**Rosh Hashanah** is the Jewish New Year beginning nine days of penitence. Rosh Hashanah occurs on the first and second days of Tishri. In Hebrew it means "First of the year." It is a time to begin introspection, looking back at the mistakes of the past year and planning the changes to make in the new year. This is a festive holiday, and prayer at the Synagogue often ends with sharing of things sweet to eat and joyous holiday wishes.

**Yom Kippur** means "Day of Atonement," a solemn day devoted to prayer, fasting and repentance. Yom Kippur is probably the most important holiday of the Jewish year, occurring on the 10th day of Tishri. It is a complete Sabbath, a day to set aside to atone for the sins of the past year. No work can be performed on this day, and observers engage in a 25-hour fast beginning before sunset on the evening before Yom Kippur and ending after nightfall on the day of Yom Kippur (unless health restrictions prevent fasting). Most of the holiday is spent in the synagogue, in prayer. Services end with nightfall, and often the fast is broken with a shared feast.

**Passover** (Pesach) is a celebration marking the deliverance of the Jews from slavery in Egypt. This is the most commonly observed Jewish holiday, even by otherwise non-observant Jews. Pesach begins on the 15th day of the Jewish month of Nissan. The primary observances of Pesach are related to the Exodus from Egypt after generations of slavery. The "worship" portion of the holiday takes place on the first day or two days of the holiday, when Jews have a special family meal called a seder (meaning "order") including a specific set of information recalling the Exodus from Egypt. Dietary restrictions are maintained for eight days beginning with the seder meal.

Holidays begin at sundown on the day listed

	Rosh Hashanah	Yom Kippur	Passover
2005	Oct. 3(evening) & Oct. 4 (day & evening)	Oct. 12 (evening) & Oct. 13 (day and evening)	Apr. 23 (evening) & Apr. 24 (evening)
2006	Sept. 22 (evening) & Sept. 23 (day & evening)	Oct. 1 (evening) & Oct. 2 (day & evening)	Apr. 12 (evening) & Apr. 13 (evening)
2007	Sept. 12 (evening) & Sept. 13 (day and evening)	Sept. 21 (evening) & Sept. 22 (day and evening)	Apr. 2 (evening) & Apr. 3 (evening)

### Islam

**Ramadan** is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Throughout the daylight hours of Ramadan, Muslims observe strict fasting from sunup to sundown. This month is held in honor of the Prophet Mohammed, for it was during the month of Ramadan that Allah revealed the first verses of the Qur'an, the holy book of Islam.

**Eid al-Fitr** is probably the most important Islamic holiday, and occurs on the day following the month of Ramadan. A joyous feast is celebrated among the community. Literally the "Festival of Breaking the Fast," Eid al-Fitr is one of the two most important Islamic celebrations (the other occurs after an individual engages in the Hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca). At Eid al-Fitr people dress in their finest clothes, adorn their homes with lights and decorations, give treats to children, and enjoy visits with friends and family.

**Eid ul Adha** marks the end of the Hajj, which is an annual pilgrimage of Muslims to Makkah (Saudi Arabia). This pilgrimage is an obligation once in a lifetime for those who are physically and financially able to perform it. Eid ul Adha is celebrated with prayers.

	Islamic New Year	Ramadan	Eid ul Fitr	Eid ul Adha
2005/6	Feb. 10, 2005	Oct. 5, 2005	Nov. 4, 2005	Jan. 10, 2006
2006	Jan. 31, 2006	Sept. 24, 2006	Oct. 24, 2006	Dec. 31, 2006
2007	Jan. 20, 2007	Sept. 13, 2007	Oct. 13, 2007	Dec. 20, 2007

## Christianity

The three major holidays for Christians: Christmas, Easter and Pentecost are nationally observed or fall on a Sunday. Two additional holidays are important for practicing Christians to observe:

**Ash Wednesday** marks the beginning of Lent for Christians, both Catholic and Protestant. It occurs on the Wednesday before the first Sunday in Lent, six weeks before Easter Sunday. Ashes, made from palm fronds, are blessed and distributed to those observing this day by signing participants with the sign of the cross on the forehead. This symbolizes our mortality and need for repentance. This is also a day of fast and abstinence from meat for Catholics. Worship often occurs in the evening, but may be at various times throughout the day.

**Good Friday** is the Friday before Easter, and is a celebration of the passion, suffering and death by crucifixion of Jesus. Because the passion resulted in salvation for sinners, the day is called "good," and the liturgy reflects on love as much as loss. Participants reflect not only on their own sinfulness but also God's incomparable love for us. Worshipers often attend services at noon, although worship can occur at any time on Good Friday.

	Ash Wednesday	Good Friday
2006	March 1	April 14
2007	Feb. 21	April 6
2008	Feb. 6	March 21

## Baha'i

**Declaration of the Bab** is celebrated 2 hours after sunset on May 22, for on this evening in 1844, the Bab revealed his station and mission to the first follower. The Bab was the forerunner of the Baha'i Faith, similar to John the Baptist in Christianity, except he is believed to have received a full Revelation from God and His station is at the same level as Moses, Christ, Muhammed and Baha'u'llah.

**Ascension of Baha'u'llah.** Baha'ullah is the faith's prophet/founder. At 3am on this date in 1892, Baha'u'llah is believed to have left his earthly garment after 40 years of exile and imprisonment.

**Martyrdom of the Bab.** At noon on this day in 1850, the Bab was executed by a firing squad of 750 soldiers.

**Ninth Day of Ridvan** is the day that Baha'u'llah's family joined him in the Garden and he declared his mission to some of his followers.

**Birth of Baha'u'llah** (born in the year 1817).

Ninth Day of Rivdan	Declaration of the Bab	Ascension of Baha'u'llah	Martyrdom of the Bab	Birth of Baha'u'llah
April 29	May 23	May 29	July 9	Nov. 12

## **Buddhism**

There are two things to take into consideration regarding Buddhist festivals: Most Buddhists, with the exception of the Japanese, use the Lunar Calendar and the dates of Buddhist festivals vary from country to country and between Buddhist traditions. Since the celebrations have developed in different countries, and over long periods of time, there are variations.

**Vesak (“Buddha Day”)** is the major Buddhist festival of the year celebrating the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha. Traditionally celebrated on the first full moon in May, most people in the U.S. celebrate Vesak on a Sunday.

## **Hinduism**

**Diwali (“Festival of Lights”)** The name of this five day festival means "rows of lighted lamps" and the celebration is often referred to as the Festival of Lights. During this time, homes are thoroughly cleaned and windows are opened to welcome Laksmi, goddess of wealth. Candles and lamps are lit as a greeting to Laksmi. Gifts are exchanged and festive meals are prepared during Diwali. The celebration means as much to Hindus as Christmas does to Christians. The date of Diwali is based on the Hindu calendar. In 2005, Diwali fell on November 1. In 2006 it will fall on October 25.

**Holi (“Festival of Colors”)** Amongst India's innumerable festivals, Holi ranks as the most colourful. It celebrates the arrival of spring and death of demoness Holika. Observed in a colorful and boisterous manner, people shower each other with colored water and smear red and green powder on each other. In 2006 Holi will fall on March 14<sup>th</sup>.

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