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DISCOVERING THE INTERCULTURAL AND CITIZENSHIP CALENDAR

2024-2025

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Introduction

The Intercultural and citizenship calendar produced by the Direction de l'intégration linguistique et de l'éducation interculturelle (DILEI) presents a variety of religious celebrations, as well as Québec, Canadian and international historical and cultural celebrations.

The calendar makes no claim to be exhaustive. It covers the whole year and is updated every year as the dates of some celebrations vary from year to year.

The calendar includes four categories of events:

- Québec and Canadian historical and cultural commemorations, some of which correspond to statutory holidays;
- religious celebrations (Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh);
- cultural activities (the Chinese and Vietnamese Festival of Mid-Autumn, Halloween, Valentine's Day, Saint-Patrick's Day, the Persian New Year, etc.);
- international days designed to increase awareness of certain global human and ecological challenges.

The calendar may be consulted regularly by school staff and can be linked to all subjects taught in school. It can be used for the following purposes:

- to help students discover cultural phenomena from here and elsewhere;
- to encourage reflection on the great universal values that have come to be recognized over time and on the challenges of today and the future, such as achieving gender equality; overcoming racism, discrimination and war; encouraging tolerance; and combatting the ecological degradation of the planet;
- to organize class or school projects that promote openness to diversity or educate students about citizenship and their rights.

Additional information

1. Time zones create a difference between Québec and other parts of the world. The dates given here for Christian, Jewish and Muslim celebrations are for Québec. Also, according to Jewish and Muslim traditions, the day starts at sunset.
2. The dates of most religious celebrations vary from year to year. The difference ranges from a few days to a few weeks, depending on the calendar used. Furthermore, some celebrations are not annual.
3. The dates of some celebrations, particularly Buddhist and Hindu, may vary by country and even by region (e.g. the New Year). The Intercultural and citizenship calendar indicates the most common or most widely agreed upon dates.
4. The dates and hours of the equinoxes and solstices are provided for pedagogical purposes, as these astronomical events define the seasons and form the basis for many celebrations and seasonal activities. In some cultures, the spring solstice corresponds to the start of the New Year. In Québec, the equinox and solstice occur at the same time everywhere except in the Îles-de-la-Madeleine, which are in the Atlantic Time Zone. There, they occur one hour earlier.
5. The Intercultural and citizenship calendar is a pedagogical resource. It cannot be used to determine statutory holidays for school staff, as these are stipulated in the collective agreements and during specific negotiations between parties.

Comments on celebrations and different calendars

The dates of many religious celebrations vary from one year to another, for different reasons. Like Easter, many celebrations, especially those of the eastern religions, are based on astronomical events such as the solstices or, most often, the phases of the moon.

Human beings and civilizations have been dividing time into months and years for many centuries. This cultural procedure is based on the positions of the astronomical bodies in the sky, basically the positions of the sun (equinox, solstice) and the moon (waxing, waning, full, new). This relationship with the sky is linked to the relationship between human societies and nature, and many celebrations are associated with the seasonal cycles (spring, fall, monsoon) or have agricultural origins (sowing period, harvest).

Depending on the culture, the year may be divided into solar months, lunar months or lunisolar months. The solar calendar, which is based on the path of the sun across the sky, has 365 days, organized arbitrarily into months, usually 12 months. The Gregorian calendar used today is a solar calendar. The lunar calendar follows the phases of the moon (which last 29.5 days). With its 29- or 30-day months, it is in harmony with nature, but it can never add up to 365 days. The lunisolar calendar, by periodically adding days or months, tries to synchronize the lunar months with the solar year.

European countries have long been using solar calendars: in 46 BCE, Julius Caesar introduced the Julian calendar in use until the introduction of the Gregorian calendar by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582. The Gregorian calendar is the most commonly used on the planet today, and it is used to determine the date of most Christian celebrations. However, certain Orthodox Christian Churches still celebrate according to the Julian calendar and some celebrations can thus occur on a different day than in the Gregorian calendar.

A lunar calendar, the Hegirian (hijri) calendar, is used to determine the date of muslim celebrations. The physical observation of the first crescent of the new moon marks the beginning of each month. The “night of doubt” designates the last night of the lunar month, when the new moon will be visible, or not. If a thin crescent of moon is visible in the West before the last daylight disappears, the new month begins. If not, a new day is added to the ongoing month. However, depending on the location, the new moon is not always visible at the same time, which is why the calendars and the dates of certain celebrations can vary from one country to the other. The night of doubt is more specifically known to determine the beginning of the month of Ramadan, and its end, 29 or 30 days later.

It is difficult to transpose dates from one calendar to another, especially when India and East Asia have several religious calendars, which can overlap locally. This explains why the New Year is celebrated at different time of the year by different religions and countries. The start of the new year sometimes coincides with the spring equinox, a sign of the renewal of nature. Although the Christian and Buddhist calendars are based, respectively, on the lives of Jesus and Buddha, and the Jewish calendar recalls key moments in the history of the Jewish people, all calendars, even when they commemorate divine interventions, remain closely linked to the cycles of nature, the basis of agricultural civilizations.

It should also be noted that the number used to designate the current year varies according to religious calendar. This is because religious calendars (or the religions themselves) were not all established in the same period or do not use the same references to mark year 0 or year 1 (e.g. the historical appearance of Jesus, Buddha or Mohammed).

The DILEI wishes to thank Frédéric Castel, geographer, historian and religiologist, for his valuable contribution to this Intercultural and citizenship calendar.

The New Year according to different calendars

2024-2025 School Year

CALENDAR	DATE OF THE NEW YEAR CELEBRATION IN THE GREGORIAN CALENDAR	YEAR STARTING...	TYPE OF CALENDAR
Gregorian	January 1, 2025	2025	Solar
Muslim or Hegirian	July 7, 2024	1446	Lunar
Jewish or Hebrew	October 2 to 4, 2024	5785	Lunisolar
Julian	January 14, 2025	2025	Solar
Mahayana Buddhist	January 14, 2025	2569	Lunisolar
Chinese or Vietnamese	January 29, 2025	4723 Year of the Snake	Lunisolar
Nanak Shahi Sikh	March 14, 2025	557	Solar
Persian	March 20 or 21, 2025	1404	Solar
Hindu	March 30, 2025	2082	Lunisolar
Indian national or Saka	April 14, 2025	1947	Solar
Theravada Buddhist	April 13, 2025	2569	Lunisolar

Web tool in French for comparing different calendars: https://www.patricklecoq.fr/convert/cnv_calendar.html

Web tool in English for comparing different calendars: <https://legacy-www.math.harvard.edu/computing/javascript/Calendar/index.html>

Celebrations and commemorations in the Intercultural and citizenship calendar

Notes

Religious celebrations are indicated in **blue** and civic celebrations, in **red**.

Green characters indicate celebrations and commemorations described in this document.

Action Week Against Racism

Variable dates, including March 21.

In 2000, to expand the scope of the **International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination** (March 21) six Québec human rights organizations established a special week of reflection and action against racism, antisemitism (fear of Jews) and islamophobia (fear of Muslims).

This week is marked by activities designed to raise public awareness of these problems and by community initiatives condemning the expression of hatred towards ethnocultural, linguistic and religious minorities and promoting dialogue between ethnocultural communities, especially among young members of these communities.

All Saints' Day

Fixed date.

This is the day of all the saints. In 837, at a time when Christianity was gaining ground in northern Europe, Pope Gregory IV sought to eliminate the Celtic celebration of the dead (Samhain) by adding All Saints' Day to the liturgical calendar.

Like **Halloween** and the **All Souls' Day**, All Saints' Day expresses the continuity between heaven and earth by linking believers with all the saints who achieved celestial beatitude (including the martyrs of the Church), whether canonized or not. This was a statutory holiday in Québec until the Catholic reform of Vatican II (1962-1965).

All Souls' Day

Fixed date.

This celebration, involving a spiritual reunion between the living and the dead, is devoted to the memory of those who have passed into the other world. It was established after the year 1000 to ensure that **All Saints' Day** retained its meaning.

According to the tradition, believers wishing to ensure the salvation of their loved ones offer many prayers, masses, fasts and alms to the poor, who are the symbolic representatives of the deceased. People also go to the cemetery to put flowers on the tombstones of the departed.

In the last two hundred years, the religious dimension of All Souls' Day has waned, although it is still celebrated, around monuments to the dead, by municipal institutions in some countries.

Anniversary of the signing of the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement

Fixed date.

On November 11, 1975, the Québec government, the government of Canada, Hydro-Québec, the Grand Council of the Crees of Québec and the Northern Quebec Inuit Association signed the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA). Often described as the “first modern treaty,” the JBNQA created a new legal and ultimately constitutional framework for local government autonomy, land management, the protection of traditional ways of life and the relationship between Québec and the Indigenous peoples of the James Bay and Northern Quebec region.

The Agreement was signed in a very specific historical context in which Québec wanted to move ahead with its ambition to develop the hydroelectric potential of Bay James, and the Cree and Inuit were determined to protect their land and defend their rights. The JBNQA made it possible to reconcile the protection of the traditional ways of life of the Indigenous signatories and the development of the territory's natural resources. The parties to the Agreement agreed to the construction of the La Grande hydroelectric complex on the Grande River. The JBNQA also paved the way for the signing of the Northeastern Québec Agreement on January 31, 1978, with the Naskapi Nation.

The Agreement was part of a process of rapprochement through dialogue, partnership, cooperation and mutual respect. The date of the signing is an occasion for celebrating the evolution of the relationship between Québec and the Indigenous Peoples.

Anti-Bullying and Violence Awareness Week at School

Variable dates, including the first few days of October.

The Anti-Bullying and Violence Awareness Week at School was launched by the Québec government after the 2012 adoption of An Act to Prevent and Stop Bullying and Violence in Schools. During this week of awareness-raising and mobilization, school staff (in public and private schools), students and parents are urged to unite their efforts to prevent and address these problems.

The campaign against bullying and violence in the schools continues throughout the year, thanks to the contribution of resource persons responsible for applying the proposed measures on a daily basis. In this regard, cyberbullying, which is becoming more prevalent on social media these days, is a source of growing concern.

Armenian Genocide Memorial Day

Fixed date.

During World War One, the Ottoman Empire was at war with Russia. Fearing a popular rising by its Armenian population fomented with the Russians' help, the Ottoman Empire ordered the systematic elimination of Armenians between 1915 and 1917.

The genocide began on April 24, 1915, in Constantinople, with the killing of 650 Armenian leaders and intellectuals on the orders of the Ottoman government. From 1.2 million to 1.5 million Armenians perished, while others fled to escape the massacre. Between 1960 and 1990, Armenians exiled in Europe and Lebanon settled in Canada. In 1980, the Armenian community asked the Québec National Assembly to officially recognize and commemorate the massacre.

In 2003, Québec proposed An Act to proclaim Armenian Genocide Memorial Day (which entered into force the following year). This Act expresses the desire of Quebecers "to share with their fellow citizens of Armenian origin the painful memory of the events of 1915," thus reaffirming "their refusal of intolerance, ethnic exclusion and the extermination of peoples."

In 1998, the Armenian community established a monument dedicated to the victims of genocide in the Ahuntsic-Cartierville borough of Montréal. It is called *La réparation*. Because part of the community subsequently relocated to Laval, a monument to the memory of the Armenian genocide, entitled *L'Espoir*, was also built in the city of Laval in 2013.

Source: <https://www.legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/document/cs/J-0.2>

Asalha Puja

Variable date, festival observed on the fifteenth day of the waxing moon in the eighth lunar month (July).

Also called Dharma Day, this Theravada festival is meant to celebrate the first teachings of the Buddha after his enlightenment at Deer Park in Sarnath, near Benares more than 2 500 years ago.

The Buddha gave his first sermon to the five disciples who had accompanied him on his spiritual journey. He set out the doctrine of Buddhism: the four noble truths. This first sermon is known as the sermon that “set the wheel of Dharma into motion.” Asalha Puja is one of the holiest days in Buddhism; it is observed by making offerings to temples and reading Sutras.

The following day is known as Khao Pansa, the beginning of Vassa or the “rains retreat,” a period of three lunar months when the monks would stop travelling and stay in a monastery or a remote place. Since the monks were used to wandering, the Buddha declared that they had to take up residence during the monsoon. This period is also a time for Buddhist lay people to visit the monks, listen to their teachings and ask for advice about their own practice. Monks and lay people use this time to strengthen their meditation practice, making resolutions and further commitments.

Ash Wednesday

Variable date, Wednesday.

To prepare for **Easter** and to meditate on the meaning of Jesus’ life and the message of Christianity, Christians of all confessions observe Lent, a 40-day period of penitence, prayer, abstinence and fasting. This spiritual pilgrimage recalls the forty days Jesus spent in the desert struggling against the temptations of Satan, early in his public life.

Today, some Catholics abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday and on **Good Friday**; others forego sweets or other favourite foods.

For Catholics, Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, whereas for Orthodox Christians, it begins on **Clean Monday**. In church, the priest marks the foreheads of the faithful with ashes. The ash, a symbol of penance and repentance, reminds people that they are dust, and that their spirit belongs to God. Protestants also celebrate Ash Wednesday but they do not observe Lent.

Ashura

Variable date, about 11 days earlier each year. May occur the day after the date indicated, depending on the observation of the moon.

(from the Arabic term *achara*, meaning “ten”)

Although all Muslims celebrate Ashura on the tenth day of the first month in the Muslim or Hegira calendar, it has a different significance for Sunnis than it does for Shiites (also known as Shia Muslims). Sunnis commemorate Moses' (Moussa) freeing of his people from the Egyptian pharaoh who had enslaved them. Moses is one of the Islamic preaching prophets. On this day, which resembles the Jewish celebration of [Yom Kippur](#), Sunni Muslims fast for two days, breaking their fast with a festive meal.

For Shiites, Ashura is a major celebration, commemorating the tragic death, in 680, of the imam Hussein, grandson of the prophet Mohammed, and 72 of his followers in the terrible battle of Karbala (Iraq) against the army of the Umayyad Caliphate (a great Islamic empire of the Middle Ages). The imam was the spiritual leader of the Shia community. Moving ceremonies recounting the narrative of the passion of Hussain, ideally read by a poet specialized in this ceremony, are held in mosques. People express sadness that their ancestors abandoned their spiritual leader at Karbala.

Asian Heritage Month

Asian Heritage Month has been celebrated across Canada since the 1990s. In December 2001, the Senate adopted a motion proposed by Senator Vivienne Poy to officially designate May as Asian Heritage Month in Canada. In May 2002, the government of Canada signed an official declaration to do so.

Asian Heritage Month started in 1979 as a week of celebrations in the United States. Jeanie F. Jew, a member of the Organization of Chinese Americans and former Congressional staff member, approached Frank Horton, the representative for the state of New York, with the idea to designate a month to recognize Americans of Asian heritage and their contributions. In June 1977, Representatives Horton and Norman Y. Mineta introduced a resolution in the United States House of Representatives to declare the first ten days of May as Asian-Pacific Heritage Week.

The month of May was chosen to celebrate two historic events: the arrival of the first Japanese immigrant in the United States on May 7, 1843 and the completion, on May 10, 1869, of the first transcontinental railroad, which was built through the work of many Chinese labourers.

In the last 200 years, many people from East, South, West, Central and South-East Asia have immigrated to Canada. People from this diverse, dynamic and growing community have contributed to all aspects of Canadian life, such as the arts, science, sports, business and public service. They have also brought a rich cultural heritage made up of many languages and religious traditions. Asian Heritage Month allows us to learn more about the history of Canadians of Asian descent and to reflect on and recognize the historical and ongoing contributions of this community.

Beginning of the Muslim fast for the month of Ramadan

Variable date, about 11 days earlier each year. May begin the day after the date indicated, depending on the observation of the moon.

(Ramadan: Arabic term meaning “intense heat,” which designates the current month in the Muslim lunar calendar)

For Muslims, Ramadan is the name of the month during which God began to reveal the Koran, in 609. This is a time for reflection conducive to repentance, purification and charity. The Ramadan fast, which constitutes the fourth pillar of Islam, is observed from dawn to dusk. Every evening when the sun goes down, the fast is broken by a festival meal (iftar) with family or friends.

Beginning of the pilgrimage to Mecca

Variable date, about 11 days earlier each year. May begin the day after the date indicated, depending on the observation of the moon.

The first ten days of the last month of the Muslim lunar calendar (*dhou al-hidja*, “month of pilgrimage”) are the most important in the Muslim year. This is an appropriate time for performing acts of piety or giving to the poor.

Every Muslim who can, must, at least once in his or her life, undertake a pilgrimage (Hajj) to Mecca. The Hajj is held every year, from the eighth to the twelfth day of the month of pilgrimage. During this period, two millions believers gather to experience the sacred and human solidarity. The pilgrims seek unity with God, who is always present in their spirit, and embrace a sense of sharing by joining with believers of other ethnic or cultural origins.

The highlight of the journey occurs when the thousands of pilgrims circle the famous black cube-shaped temple of the Kaaba, which, according to the Muslim tradition, was built by Abraham (Ibrahim) and his son Ishmael. The ninth day of the pilgrimage, the “day of Arafa,” is devoted to a fast that absolves the minor sins of the previous two years. The following day, the pilgrims celebrate [Eid al-Adha](#).

Beginning of the Pow Wow season among the First Nations

Variable date, around June 1, sometimes at the end of May.

According to a tradition that goes back thousands of years, between June 1 and mid-September, Québec's Indigenous communities generally organize a series of festivals called pow wows (New England Algonquian term meaning "spiritual chief").

These festivals, which are usually held on weekends, include canoe races, Lacrosse games, drum competitions, tasting of traditional foods, spiritual ceremonies and craft exhibitions. Pow wows also provide an opportunity to wear flamboyant traditional costumes, especially during dance contests.

The season usually begins in late May or early June at Kitigan Zibi, near Maniwaki, and continues throughout Québec, ending in September with the Akwesasne festival.

Birthday of Guru Nanak

Variable date.

This celebration commemorates the birth of Guru Nanak (1469-1538), founder of Sikhism, a religion that originated in the Punjab (India) and is influenced both by Hinduism and by Islam. Guru Nanak adopted a socially egalitarian position quite different from the Indian customs of the time and from the caste system.

He was the first of the ten spiritual leaders (all called "Guru") who succeeded each other until the 18th century and who established the foundations of the Sikh religion.

During the two days preceding the celebration, the biography of Guru Nanak is read continuously in the temple by a series of readers. In India, Sikhs decorate their houses and hold processions on his birthday.

Black History Month

The American historian Carter Godwin Woodson (1875-1950) sought to change the way history relating to Blacks was written and taught, so that the contribution of Blacks to the community would be visible and these lesser-known aspects of the cultural heritage would be integrated into the curriculum. To this end, in February 1926, he established Negro History Week. He chose February in honour of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln, two great figures in the history of antislavery who were born in this month.

In 1976, in the wake of the American bicentennial, Black History Week became Black History Month, an event whose importance is recognized by the United States government. In 1991, Montréal became the first francophone city to embrace the idea. On the recommendation of Jean Augustine, the first black female member of Parliament, elected in 1993, the Canadian Parliament established a Black History Month in 1995.

In 2006, the National Assembly of Québec adopted An Act to proclaim Black History Month in order to recognize the contribution of the Black population to Québec's socioeconomic development over the past four centuries and to pay homage to various historical figures who have marked our history over the years. This law is intended to imbue members of the Black communities with a sense of pride and to encourage all citizens to participate fully in society by fostering inclusion and bringing Quebecers together.

Although the Black population once came mainly from the United States and the West Indies, successive waves of immigration have diversified Québec's Black communities, which now include people from various African countries. Among the Blacks who have marked Québec history, some have been prominent in the arts (Oliver Jones, Oscar Peterson in jazz, Édouard (Eddy) Toussaint in dance and Dany Laferrière in literature). Key moments occurred in 1976, when Jean Alfred became the first Black member of the National Assembly (MNA), and in 2007, when Yolande James became the first Black cabinet minister. Indeed, Blacks have made contributions in all areas, going back to the time of Champlain, when Mathieu da Costa served as an interpreter between the French and the Indigenous people.

Bodhi Day

Fixed date in Japan and in the Western world; variable date in the Chinese luni-solar calendar (Laba Festival, 8th day of the 12th lunar month).

This commemorates the enlightenment of Siddhârta Gautama, later known as the Buddha, 25 centuries ago, under a tree in Bodhgaya, near Benares, in northern India. For Buddhists all over the world, Bodhgaya is now an important pilgrimage site. The effort to achieve enlightenment is the Buddhists' ultimate objective. It allows one to reach nirvana, a state of illumination and liberation. It is by achieving enlightenment that Gautama attained the status of Buddha, that is, "Enlightened one" (see [Parinirvana](#)). Buddhists place images of the Buddha under a small tree, traditionally a fig tree, in their homes. Every evening for a month, they light candles symbolizing illumination.

Buddhist New Year – Mahayana Buddhism

Variable date, full moon.

In the Far East, the day of the first full moon in January, which marks the beginning of the Buddhist liturgical year, is primarily celebrated in the temples. In that part of the world, however, the main focus of celebration is the **Chinese New Year**, which is accompanied by many festive cultural activities.

Buddhist New Year – Theravada Buddhism

Variable date, first full moon in April.

The New Year festivities, which last three or four days, mark the end of the harvest season in Southeast Asia. People prepare by cleaning their houses from top to bottom, purifying themselves of the wrongdoing accumulated over the past year and renewing their Buddhist vows.

Near temples and rivers, the faithful build stûpas out of sand (religious monuments evoking the death of Buddha), which will later be levelled to symbolize the great cleansing ritual associated with the start of the new year. Moved by compassion, people come to the aid of animals in difficulty or of those in need. The celebrations also involve dancing, water fights and boat racing.

The New Year takes different names, depending on the country and the cultural origins: the Khmers call it Chol Chnam, the Laotians Pi May and the Thais Songkran.

Canada Day

Fixed date.

Canada Day, which is celebrated on July 1, is the anniversary of the creation of the Dominion of Canada, a new state born in 1867 under the British North America Act, uniting New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Lower Canada (Québec) and Upper Canada (Ontario).

This statutory holiday was first referred to as the anniversary of Confederation in a federal law in 1879. It was later called Dominion Day and, on October 27, 1982, it officially became Canada Day.

Candlemas

Fixed date (February 15 in some Orthodox churches, according to the Julian calendar).

This very old Christian celebration, which occurs 40 days after Christmas, is better known as Candlemas (“festival of candles”). It commemorates the presentation of the infant Jesus at the Temple of Jerusalem for religious rites and his meeting with a wise man named Simeon.

Candlemas, which coincides with the American Groundhog Day, is celebrated by Catholic and Orthodox Christians, but not by Protestants. In Roman antiquity, it involved a candlelight procession. On this day, Pope Gelasius I distributed pancakes to pilgrims who had come from afar. The tradition of eating pancakes on Candlemas has persisted ever since. A more recent custom is for the faithful to receive, at the end of the ceremony, a candle that has been blessed, as a form of protection, as light expels evil.

Chinese and Vietnamese Mid-Autumn Festival

Variable date, the 15th day of the 8th lunar month.

After the New Year, this festival is the most important celebration in the Far East (China, Vietnam, Korea, Japan). It was originally an agricultural festival related to the rice harvest.

In China, in the evening, people look up at the moon, which is thought to be at its shiniest at this time of year, and visit family. The full moon symbolizes the family gathered together. In Vietnam, this is the “Children’s Festival.” Accompanied by dragons and carrying moon—or star—shaped lanterns, the children participate in masked parades. Both Chinese and Vietnamese also celebrate by eating “mooncakes,” which may be the ancestors of the famous Chinese almond cookies.

Chinese and Vietnamese New Year

Variable date.

The term Chinese New Year (Chūn Jié) is incorrect, as the first day of the Chinese lunar calendar is also celebrated in neighbouring countries such as Vietnam (Tết Nguyen Dan) and Korea (Seollal). The celebration begins on the evening before the New Year and lasts from three to seven days, depending on the country. It is the most important and most lavishly celebrated holiday of the year.

To start the year on a good footing, it is essential to clear away the past by paying off any debts and seeking pardon for any offenses committed. People clean their houses and decorate them with seasonal flowers and mandarin oranges to bring good luck, and put on new clothes. To fend off evil spirits, the Vietnamese plant a tree in front of their house and the Chinese set off firecrackers. Red, the colour of prosperity, predominates in clothing and ornaments. New Year's is above all a family celebration: people visit relatives, exchange good wishes and pray to their ancestors. Elders give children red envelopes containing coins. The highlight of the day is the dazzling dance of the dragon.

In recent years, the custom of giving coins has been practised in some temples in Québec, while the dance of the dragon, to the sound of drums and firecrackers, is performed in Chinese neighbourhoods in many Western cities.

Christmas

Fixed date (January 7 in some Orthodox churches, according to the Julian calendar).

(from the Old English term Christ's Mass)

In 353, the Church chose December 25 as the date for celebrating the birth of Jesus throughout the West, thereby replacing the old pagan celebration marking the winter solstice. The choice was appropriate, because Christ represents light in the world, and because the solstice heralds the victory of the sun over winter.

This holiday commemorates the birth of Jesus in a stable in Bethlehem, on a day when all the inns were full. Jesus, with his mother, Mary, and his father, Joseph, at his side, was kept warm by the breath of an ox and a donkey in the stable. Angels spread the news of the birth of the Messiah to shepherds, who came, along with three Wise Men to visit the infant. All the figures in the story are portrayed in the Christmas crèche, which appeared in the 13th century and, in later years, people began to place under the Christmas tree.

Decorating a Christmas tree is an old German tradition that was popularized in England by Queen Victoria (whose mother was of German origin) and subsequently spread to North America. In some European countries, children receive presents on December 6, in honour of Saint Nicolas (Sinterklaas in Dutch, Santa Claus in English). Dressed in red like a bishop, Saint Nicolas is the protector of school children, and rewarded the best behaved among them with candies and presents. Saint Nicolas is the ancestor of Father Christmas, who has come to be known as Santa Claus among English-speaking North Americans.

In present-day Québec, the Khmer and Laotian communities mainly celebrate the New Year at home. In the temples, the faithful can also share a feast, spend time with monks and relax. In the evening, cultural activities, including dancing and singing, are also organized in some public places.

Clean Monday

Variable date, Monday.

In Orthodox churches, Clean Monday marks the beginning of the Great Lent, a period of preparation for [Easter](#) that ends the Friday before [Palm Sunday](#). During these days of abstinence and fasting (see [Ash Wednesday](#)), the faithful avoid eating foods of animal sources, including eggs and dairy products.

During the week, they drink no wine and, as far as possible, eat only one meal per day (two on the weekend). Fasting is seen as a proof of faith, a return to the essential and an act of purification enabling people to better appreciate the meaning of Easter.

Diwali (Hinduism)

Variable date, according to the phases of the moon.

(contraction of *Dipavali*, Sanskrit term meaning “row of lamps”, “necklace of lights”)

In north-eastern India, the “great festival of light” marks the end of the rainy season and the point in time when the night is darkest. For five days, people celebrate the victory of the God Rama over his enemies and his return to the realm of Ayodhya after 14 years of exile. This celebration symbolizes the triumph of light over darkness, of knowledge over ignorance, of good over evil. The third day honours Lakshmi, the goddess of abundance, by means of a puja, a ritual of prayer and offerings.

Towns and villages set off fireworks and firecrackers and light thousands of lamps and lanterns to help Rama find his way. The doorways of houses are decorated with garlands of flowers, and lamps and candles are placed in the windows to allow Lakshmi to peek inside. The ground is covered with traditional geometric designs (*rangolis*), made of flowers or coloured rice flour.

In some regions of India, this festival, which serves as a lead-in to winter, coincides with the lunar New Year. In that case, people wear new clothing for the occasion.

In Québec, in recent years, religious plays, song and dance shows, children’s festivals (recalling Halloween in some ways), and even fashion shows have been put on to mark this day.

Diwali (Sikhism)

Variable date, according to the phases of the moon.

Indian Sikhs also celebrate Diwali, but they do so to commemorate the liberation of Guru Hargobind (1595-1644), sixth of the founding gurus of the Sikh religion, who had been imprisoned by the Mughal emperor Jahangir. On this day, houses and temples are decorated with lanterns, lamps and candles, especially the Golden Temple, an important Sikh religious site, which is located in Amritsar, in India.

In recent years, the Sikh community in the LaSalle district of Montréal has celebrated this day with fireworks.

Easter

Variable date, Sunday (the date varies in some Orthodox churches, according to the Julian calendar).

(term derived from the Hebrew Pesach, meaning “Exodus” or “Passover”)

According to Christian tradition, three days after his crucifixion, Jesus rose from the dead during the Jewish Passover. Like his disciples who rejoiced to see him, Christians gather to commemorate this miracle that marks the end of Lent.

Easter is the most important Christian celebration. It falls on the Sunday following the first full moon after the vernal equinox. Although this method of calculation is complex, the result is that Easter is sometimes celebrated on the same day by all Christian Churches, even if some of them use the Gregorian calendar and others the Julian calendar.

From the balcony of Saint Peter’s Basilica in Rome, the Pope blesses the Roman citizens (*urbi*, Latin term meaning “to the city of Rome”) as well as the Catholics of the rest of the world (*orbi*, Latin term meaning “to the world”).

Locally, churches are in a state of high activity, and Christians who only attend mass once a year take Communion on this occasion. Following a tradition dating back to Antiquity and symbolizing creation, children receive eggs on Easter morning. For Christians, the eggs represent the empty tomb left by Jesus. Originally, people painted and decorated and distributed hardboiled eggs. According to a German legend, popularized in Britain and North America, the eggs were brought by the Easter rabbit or bunny. In 18th-century France, eggshells were filled with melted chocolate. In the late 19th century, they began making moulded chocolate eggs made of hard chocolate.

Eid al-Adha

Variable date, about 11 days earlier each year. May occur the day after the date indicated, depending on the observation of the moon.

(Arabic term meaning “Festival of the sacrifice”)

In the Islamic tradition, there are only two celebrations recognized by all the Muslims in the world: Eid al-Adha, the festival of the sacrifice, and [Eid al-Fitr](#), which breaks the fast of the month of Ramadan

Eid al-Adha is the more important of the two celebrations. Also called “Eid al-Kebir,” this high celebration occurs on the tenth day of the month of pilgrimage (*dhou al-hidja*) and lasts three to four days. It commemorates Abraham’s obedience to God, for Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son as commanded by God, but was stopped at the last minute by the archangel Gabriel (Jibril, in Arabic). At the end of the pilgrimage, the sacrifice of a sheep recalls this episode symbolically. In Muslim countries, the sheep is sometimes replaced by a lamb or a goat. The families give one third of the animal to the poor.

To mark the pilgrimage to Mecca, tradition requires that pilgrims walk to the mosque in the morning and return by a different route. In recent years, these traditions of sharing and of visiting the mosque to pray have spread to Québec. For the convenience of Muslim immigrants, the alms may also be distributed in the form of money to the poor or to relatives who remain in the home country.

Eid al-Fitr

Variable date, about 11 days earlier each year. May occur the day after the date indicated, depending on the observation of the moon.

(Arabic term meaning “Festival of the breaking of the fast”)

Celebration of fraternity, gratitude, forgiveness and reconciliation, Eid al-Fitr marks the break of the [Muslim fast for the month of Ramadan](#), which lasts 29 or 30 days. It is the first day of the month of Shawwal in the Hegirian calendar.

On that day, which is one of the most important of the year, many rituals are observed: getting up before dawn, taking a ritual bath and eating – preferably dates – before leaving the house dressed in new clothes or in the best clothes one has, giving alms generously, participating in the collective prayer at the mosque or outside, going to prayer by foot if possible and taking another route on the way back, with the aim of meeting as many people as possible to exchange congratulations and good wishes.

Celebrations can last one, two or three days, filled with family reunions and visits with friends to exchange good wishes and forgive past rancour. People wear new clothes, hold feasts and give children presents.

Emancipation Day

Fixed date.

On March 24, 2021, the House of Commons voted unanimously to officially designate August 1 as Emancipation Day. It marks the actual day in 1834 that the *Slavery Abolition Act* came into effect across the British Empire.

The history of slavery in Canada and Québec is often not well known, having been eclipsed by the more widespread practice of slavery in the Americas, particularly in the southern United States and the Caribbean colonies. On the other hand, slavery here was not a marginal phenomenon: thousands of Indigenous people as well as African and Afrodescendant people came under the control of New France and British rule.

Emancipation Day is intended to encourage the population to learn more about the history of slavery and to become more aware of the effects of racism and discrimination.

Source: <https://www.parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/42-1/bill/S-255/first-reading?col=2>

Epiphany

Variable date, January 6 or the first Sunday after January 1st.

(from the Greek term *epiphaneia*, meaning “manifestation [or appearance] of God”)

Better known since the 19th century as Three Kings’ Day or the Feast of the Magi, Epiphany marks the end of the holiday season and recalls the visit of the three Magi to the infant Jesus. Having been told about the birth of the Messiah, the Magi were guided to Bethlehem by a glittering star. They brought the child gold, frankincense and myrrh. For four centuries, Epiphany, on January 6—twelve days after **Christmas**—was the only Christian celebration marking the coming of the Messiah. Today, Epiphany is celebrated on January 6 or on the first Sunday after January 1st.

On the day of Epiphany, people share Twelfth Night Cake, which was previously called King’s Cake. This custom, which goes back to the Roman Saturnalia, appeared in France in the 14th century. According to the tradition, the person who finds the bean in the cake becomes king or queen of the day and has the privilege of wearing a paper crown for the rest of the day.

Since 2003, the Catholic Church in Québec City has been using the symbolism of the Magi, who came from the East, to celebrate an intercultural mass that welcomes the faithful from the four corners of the globe.

Fall Equinox

Variable date, often September 22, sometimes September 23.

An equinox is a point in the Earth's orbit that is reached when the sun is at its zenith. The Fall equinox occurs in September in the Northern hemisphere and in March in the Southern hemisphere. At this exact moment, day and night are of equal duration, but starting on the day after the Fall equinox, the nights get increasingly longer than the days.

Feast of the Ascension

Variable date, Thursday (the date varies in some Orthodox churches, according to the Julian calendar).

According to the New Testament, after his resurrection from the dead on [Easter](#), Jesus spent 40 days on earth with his disciples, after which he rose from the Mount of Olives to heaven to be reunited with his heavenly Father.

On Ascension Thursday, 40 days after Easter, Christians of all confessions commemorate Christ's return to his Father and his spirit's transcendence of time and space.

First Sunday of Advent

Variable date.

On the fourth Sunday before [Christmas](#), most Christians prepare, in a sober, reflective spirit, for the birth of Jesus, the Messiah. The first day of Advent marks the beginning of the liturgical year for Catholic and Protestant Churches.

In early 20th century Germany, parents gave their children Advent calendars with 24 little windows to open one by one every December morning until Christmas. This tradition, designed to help children wait for Christmas, was adopted 50 years later in France and the United States. Today, some calendars have candy or chocolates in their windows.

In some Christian churches, this period, called Advent Lent or the Nativity Fast, lasts six weeks and begins in mid-November.

Francofête

Variable dates including March 20.

In Québec, as in French Canada, the week of the Francofête, which includes the [International Francophonie Day](#), gives citizens a chance to express the pride and pleasure they take in living in French, a symbol of their identity, which is unique in North America.

Every year since 1992, as part of the festivities, the Office québécois de la langue française (Québec Board of the French Language), in collaboration with the Société des auteurs de radio, télévision et cinéma (Authors Society of Radio, Television and Cinema), the Union des artistes (Artist Union) and the Union des écrivaines et des écrivains québécois (Québec Union of Writers), presents the award “Mérite du français dans la culture” to individuals who have contributed to the enrichment and promotion of the French language.

Ganesh Chaturthi

Variable date.

(Hindi term meaning “fourth day of Ganesh”)

This celebration, which occurs on the fourth day after the full moon, is an occasion for festivities and a carnallike parade of statues of the God Ganesh. Ganesh, the elephant-headed son of the God Shiva and the Goddess Parvati is one of the most popular Hindu deities, and is associated with beginnings, such as preparation for marriage, or a move, as he overcomes obstacles and brings good luck. Because he is considered a protector of students, his help is regularly invoked during exam periods.

Because Hinduism honours many deities, it may seem to be a polytheistic religion. However, scholarly tradition maintains that all of the gods in the shape of humans or animals are really only expressions of the one supreme God, who is most often called “Brahman.”

Good Friday

Variable date, Friday (the date varies in some Orthodox churches, according to the Julian calendar).

On the eve of Good Friday, on Maundy Thursday, Christians commemorate the Last Supper—the last meal that Jesus shared with his apostles on the first day of the Jewish celebration of Passover (see [Pesach](#)). At this meal, he took the opportunity to explain the celebration of the Eucharist to them, using unleavened bread and wine, presaging his ultimate sacrifice the following day. Communion, a symbolic commemoration of this sacrifice, is central to the Christian ritual.

On Good Friday, Christians relate the Passion, the sufferings of Jesus. After being betrayed by Judas, Jesus was arrested by the Romans and brought before the Jewish court, or Sanhedrin, where he was accused of blasphemy for having declared in public that he was the Messiah. Unable to apply the death penalty, the Jewish court transferred him to the Roman prefect Pontius Pilate, who was obliged to sentence him to death. Jesus was crucified on Mount Calvary.

The Passion is commemorated in different ways depending on the country. All Catholic churches possess a Stations of the Cross (14 images illustrating the stages of the Passion).

In some English-speaking countries, it is the custom to eat hot cross buns, which are decorated with a cross of icing sugar recalling the crucifixion of Jesus. Since the 1970s, in some Québec towns, pilgrims participate in a Good Friday Walk to commemorate this event.

Guru Purnima

Variable date, in July.

(guru: Sanskrit term meaning teacher, instructor, master)

Guru Purnima is a Nepalese and Indian festival dedicated to academic and spiritual teachers, who are celebrated during the full moon (Purnima) in the month of Ashadha (June-July). This festival is traditionally celebrated by Hindus, Jains, Marwadi and Buddhists, to honour their teachers and express their gratitude. In India, the teacher, the one who shares knowledge, is greatly respected. As knowledge is sacred, those who share it have a good reputation. Traditionally, knowledge was passed on orally and was treasured; receiving an education was a rare privilege. Guru Purnima is devoted to reducing ignorance and lifting up people's lives through knowledge.

Halloween and National UNICEF Day

Fixed date.

(contraction of the English expression All Hallows' Eve, meaning "eve of all saints," or "eve of All Saints' Day")

Halloween, which goes back 2 500 years, marks the eve of Samhain, the Celtic New Year, which was widely celebrated in Gaul and the British Isles. According to tradition, the world of the dead joined the world of the living during the night of Samhain. People drank beer and mead, as drunkenness was believed to favour contact with the spirits, who became visible on this occasion. Food was left at the gates of villages to placate the visitors from the beyond.

This celebration later became a favourite of children, who, in the Christian tradition, would leave a basket for sweets at the doors of houses. After sundown, they would return for their share of the distribution, disguised as ghosts or witches. The iconic Halloween lantern, a hollowed-out turnip in the form of a skull, with a burning candle inside, came from an old Irish tale.

Halloween was brought to North America by Irish immigrants in the late 19th century, and is now celebrated throughout the continent, only a pumpkin replaces the turnip. The recent tradition has children going from door to door in the evening, calling out: "Trick or treat." In Québec, francophone children used to have a less menacing request: "Charity, please."

It was in 1950 that some school children in Philadelphia first collected money for UNICEF on Halloween, to help poor children around the world. They collected 17 dollars in all. This custom rapidly spread. In Canada, the first National UNICEF Day was held in 1955, enabling trick-or-treaters to collect funds for UNICEF as well as candy.

Hanukkah

Variable dates.

(Hebrew term meaning “inauguration”)

This celebration commemorates the victory, in 164 BCE, of the troops of the Jewish resistance leader Judas Maccabeeus over the army of the Greek tyrant Antiochus Epiphanes and, more precisely, of the miracle of the phial of oil after the liberation of the Temple of Jerusalem. It seems that the amount of oil left in the bottle was barely enough for the candles of the menorah (candle holder with seven branches) to burn for one day, yet it burned miraculously for eight days.

In memory of this miracle, Jews light one additional candle of the hannukiah (a menorah with nine branches) each evening for eight evenings, using the ninth candle to light the others. They serve dishes cooked in oil and give the children little spinning tops decorated with symbols recalling the Hannukah story.

Today, many lamps and candles are lit in windows and doorways at sunset. Increasingly, the “festival of lights” bears a non-religious message to the effect that Jews and non-Jews recognize that light should be shared.

Hispanic Heritage Month

On June 15, 2018, the National Assembly of Québec declared that October is Hispanic Heritage Month (also referred to as “Latin American Heritage Month” in Canada) in recognition of the contributions of Québec’s Hispanic community to Québec society.

Québec’s Hispanic community is an important and growing social group within the province. Dedicating a month to Hispanic heritage allows all of the population of Québec to learn about Hispanic communities in Québec, their history and their role in the history of Québec. It is also an opportunity to celebrate the great diversity of their cultures and traditions as well as to share them. The month of October was chosen, as it has a special importance for Hispanic communities throughout the world.

In Spain, the National Day of Spain (or the Day of Hispanicity) is celebrated on October 12 as a commemoration of the day Christopher Columbus arrived in the Americas, on October 12, 1492. In the United States, this historic event is celebrated on the second Monday of October as Columbus Day.

Many countries in Latin America have wanted to give this day a different focus, by celebrating the struggles and resistance of Indigenous peoples. For example, in Peru, Indigenous Peoples and Intercultural Dialogue Day is celebrated; in Bolivia, Nicaragua and Venezuela, Indigenous Resistance Day is celebrated; and in Argentina, it is celebrated as the Day of Respect for Cultural Diversity.

Source: <https://www.legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/document/cs/M-37.2>

Hola Mohalla

Variable date, day of the full moon.

(Punjabi term meaning “simulated combat”)

Sikh Indians, who have the same cultural traditions as other Indians, celebrate Hola Mohalla at the same time as the Hindus celebrate Holi. It is a three-day festival involving sporting competitions and flamboyant exhibitions of *gatka* (a Sikh martial art combining spirituality, skill and aesthetics) in which both men and women participate.

Holi

Variable date, day of the full moon.

(term derived from the name of the demoness Holika)

This festival of the full moon, which heralds the arrival of spring and the renewed fertility of the land, is the liveliest celebration in northern India. It is based on a story with a happy ending, which tells how the demoness Holika tried to burn her nephew Prahlad at the stake. The young Prince Prahlad was cursed by his father. However, he was saved by the god Vishnu, while the demoness Holika was burned alive.

On the first day of the festival, people walk in the streets and sprinkle their face and clothing with brightly coloured water or powder. On this day, all the castes mingle joyously and the women can beat their husbands gently. On the second day, an image of the demoness Holika is burned in a bonfire, around which people gather for a feast. Beneath its wacky appearance, this celebration has a deep symbolic significance. It offers Hindus a chance to break harsh social barriers based on caste, gender and age and to see themselves, for a moment, as all alike in their humanness.

In Québec, the traditional bath of colours has become popular in recent years, especially with young people. In the temples, however, the volunteers soberly place a little bit of colour on the faces of those who request it.

Holocaust – Yom HaShoah Memorial Day

Variable date, according to the Jewish lunisolar calendar.

Jews were victims of violent mass attacks motivated by antisemitism in the late 19th and early 20th century in the Russian Empire, and of persecution in central Europe in the 1930s. Then, during World War Two (1939-1945), the German Nazi party, with the assistance of collaborationist regimes, established a policy of systematic persecution designed to eliminate all the European Jewish communities, by means of extermination camps. This event, called the “Holocaust” or “Shoah” (which means “catastrophe”), was responsible for six million Jewish deaths. At the end of the war, Canada accepted many survivors.

In 1999, moved by the painful memories that continued to haunt many members of Québec’s Jewish community, and considering that “it is appropriate to join our memories to theirs, to mourn, but also to educate about the enduring lessons of the Holocaust,” the National Assembly adopted An Act to proclaim Holocaust-Yom HaShoah Memorial Day in Québec. The date of the commemoration is based on the Jewish lunisolar calendar.

The Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre opened in 1979. This museum presents artefacts and digitized evidence provided by 500 survivors of the Shoah and also of the Armenian, Rwandan and Cambodian genocides.

January 27th (fixed date) is designated as the [International Holocaust Remembrance Day](#).

Source: <https://www.legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/document/cs/J-0.1>

Human Rights Day

Fixed date.

On December 10, 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and two years later, it invited all states and international organizations to observe December 10 as annual Human Rights Day. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is composed of thirty articles, which all the signing countries agree to respect, though it is not a legally binding document. From 2004 to 2008, Louise Arbour, a Quebecer, held the position of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Like the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, ratified by France in 1789, and other charters, such as the Bill of Rights adopted by the United States in 1791, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (whose original text is in French) guarantees all human beings the same fundamental rights, including equality before the law. The national charters have fostered reflection on the various forms of discrimination and have reinforced freedoms, which led, among other things, to the banning of slavery and the establishment of greater justice for women.

In 1975, Québec adopted the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms. In 1982, Canada incorporated the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms into the Constitution.

Indian solar New Year

Variable date. Usually April 14 but sometimes April 13.

For Hindus in most regions of India, April 14 (sometimes the 13) corresponds to the New Year in the Indian civil solar calendar, or Saka calendar, adopted as the Indian national calendar in 1957. However, New Year is celebrated on different dates in many regions of India, where other calendars are in use.

On this festive day, Hindus in northern India commemorate the descent to earth of the goddess Ganga by taking ritual baths in the Ganges, all along the holy cities. Elsewhere in India, the celebration is dedicated to other divinities. For this reason, it has different names and is celebrated by means of different traditions, on slightly varying dates. For example, the Tamils of Sri Lanka call it Puthandu. In northern India, the festivities coincide with the wheat harvest.

International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia

Fixed date.

Over the years, homosexuality has been repressed, tolerated and accepted at times, but the 20th century stands out as the most homophobic period in history, especially in Germany under the Nazi regime, in the Soviet Union and in the United States during the McCarthy era. Despite changes in attitudes and legal progress in the last 40 years, homosexuality is still illegal, and often severely punished, in over 69 countries.

The idea of a day against homophobia originated in Québec, in 2003. Three years later, the first World Outgames and the International Conference on LGBT Human Rights (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people) were held in Montréal. The resulting Declaration of Montréal, released in 2006, provides an overview of the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, transitioned and intersexual people and the issues affecting them.

May 17 commemorates the day in 1990 when the World Health Organization removed homosexuality from the list of mental disorders.

People celebrate this international day by organizing campaigns at school or work to fight all forms of homophobia against members of the LGBTQIA2+ communities (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersexual, asexual, two-spirited and any other sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression), including discrimination, harassment and physical violence.

International Day for the Abolition of Slavery

Fixed date.

The International Day for the Abolition of Slavery celebrates the adoption of the *Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others* by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 2, 1949.

Slavery today comes in various guises: forced marriage, child labour, debt servitude, forced labour, etc. Modern slavery extends throughout the world and affects all communities. The International Labour Association estimates that about 50 million people, mainly women and children, were victims of modern slavery in 2021. The purpose of this day is to put an end to all forms of human slavery and exploitation.

Source: <https://www.un.org/en/observances/slavery-abolition-day>

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Fixed date.

This day, proclaimed in 1966 by the United Nations, commemorates the massacre of Sharpeville, which had occurred six years earlier in South Africa. During a peaceful demonstration against the apartheid pass laws (which required Blacks to carry a pass in order to circulate in White districts), police officers opened fire on the crowd, killing 69 people. This regime of racial segregation had constructed a system based on discrimination and on the humiliation of Blacks and other non-White groups. Luckily, it was abolished, like other racist and discriminatory legislation in force at that time elsewhere in the world.

To achieve the ideals of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, the United Nations proposed the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which has been in force since 1969. Signing countries promise to respect the terms of the Convention, and in particular to condemn all acts of hateful propaganda.

International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women

Fixed date.

In 1993, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women. Six years later, it designated November 25 for the commemoration of the assassination, in 1960, of the three Mirabal sisters, civil rights militants from the Dominican Republic. Indeed, it was this country that suggested making this a day of international awareness.

Although we often associate violence against women with the Third World, it also happens in the West. According to the Ministère de la Sécurité publique, in Québec, in 2022, 25 401 people were victims of offenses against the person committed in a marital context, including 19 126 women and 6 275 men.

On this international day, the United Nations and other humanitarian organizations join forces to heighten awareness of the violence women throughout the world experience every day. This violence, which may be physical, sexual or psychological, includes threats, coercion and restriction of freedom, in public or in private.

In addition, Days of Action against violence against women are organized, as well as a 12-day consciousness-raising campaign starting November 25 and ending December 10, on [Human Rights Day](#). In Québec, the 12 days of action for the elimination of violence against women involve a joint campaign by a number of women's associations.

International Day for the Eradication of Poverty

Fixed date.

On October 17, 1987, on the Human Rights and Liberties Plaza (Esplanade du Trocadéro) in Paris, Father Joseph Wresinski and his sympathizers laid a stone dedicated to the victims of extreme poverty. This ceremony led to the establishment of the World Day to Overcome Extreme Poverty. In 1993, the General Assembly of the United Nations proclaimed October 17 International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

Poverty entails more than the lack of income and productive resources to ensure sustainable livelihoods. Its manifestations include hunger and malnutrition, limited access to education and other basic services, social discrimination and exclusion, as well as the lack of participation in decision-making.

According to estimates, in 2023, nearly 700 million people around the world were living in extreme poverty, meaning subsisting on less than \$2.15 a day.

International Day of Non-Violence

Fixed date.

The International Day of Non-Violence is celebrated on October 2, the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi, leader of India's independence movement and pioneer of the philosophy and strategy of non-violence.

According to the United Nations General Assembly resolution (A/RES/61/271) of June 15, 2007, which established the commemoration, the International Day is an occasion to "disseminate the message of non-violence, particularly through education and public awareness raising." The resolution reaffirms "the universal relevance of the principle of non-violence" and the desire "to secure a culture of peace, tolerance, understanding and non-violence."

Introducing the resolution in the General Assembly on behalf of 140 co-sponsors, India's Minister of State for External Affairs, Mr. Anand Sharma, said that the wide and diverse sponsorship of the resolution was a reflection of the universal respect for Mahatma Gandhi and of the enduring relevance of his philosophy. Quoting the late leader's own words, he said: "Non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man."

Source: <https://www.un.org/en/observances/non-violence-day>

International Day of Peace

Fixed date.

In 1981, the General Assembly of the United Nations proclaimed an international day dedicated to peace. On this occasion, celebrated on September 21 since 2002, all the nations of the world are encouraged to conclude ceasefire agreements in combat zones.

Every year, during the opening ceremony of the General Assembly of the United Nations, the secretary-general rings the Peace Bell. This bell, presented to the United Nations by Japan in 1954, is made of pieces of money collected by children from 60 countries.

This day offers an opportunity to reflect on the conflicts in most parts of the world today. Many large cities organize activities to promote peace and unity on this day.

International Day of Sport for Development and Peace

Fixed date.

In 2013, the United Nations General Assembly declared April 6 the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace. This day commemorates the opening ceremony of the first modern Olympic Games that took place on April 6, 1896. The adoption of this day signifies the increasing recognition by the United Nations of the positive influence that sport can have on the advancement of human rights and the economic and social development of societies.

As a universal language, sport has historically played an important role in every society and helped foster a culture of peace: “Sport has the power to change the world; it’s a fundamental right and a powerful tool that strengthens our social ties and promotes sustainable development, peace, solidarity and respect for all. The immense positive influence and the passion of sport bring people together, creating a more inclusive and peaceful world through its universal principles and values.” [Translation]

The Québec government also recognizes that the practice of physical activities and sports is associated with collective benefits. Based on *Fondements de la pratique sportive au Québec* (Ministère de l’Éducation et de l’Enseignement supérieur, 2019) (in French only), these benefits include:

- breaking the isolation of young people and improving their sense of belonging
- increasing student retention and educational success
- fostering values such as respect, self-improvement and teamwork
- promoting the social inclusion and integration of people newly arrived in Québec

Source: <https://www.un.org/en/observances/sport-day>

International Francophonie Day

Fixed date.

Every year since 1988, numerous activities are organised for the International Francophonie Day to celebrate the French language and the 321 million people who speak it on the planet.

The date of March 20 was chosen to honor the creation, on March 20, 1970, of the Agence de coopération culturelle et technique (ACCT) (Agency of cultural and technical cooperation), which became the Agence intergouvernementale de la Francophonie (Intergovernmental Agency of the Francophonie) in 1998, and the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (International Organisation of the Francophonie) in 2005. When founded, in 1970, the Organisation included 21 States and governments. In 2023, it is composed of 88 States and governments, including 54 members, 27 observers and 7 associates.

In Québec, the International Francophonie Day occurs during the week of the **Francofête** which offers a variety of activities celebrating the French language.

International Literacy Day

Fixed date.

This world day, proclaimed in 1965 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), underscores the role of literacy training in providing access to autonomy and collective education. According to UNESCO, literacy training is “essential for eradicating poverty, reducing child mortality, curbing population growth, achieving gender equality and ensuring sustainable development, peace and democracy.” As a result, literacy is now considered a fundamental right.

Source: <https://www.unesco.org/en/days/literacy>

International Migrants’ Day

Fixed date.

Although migration has always existed, globalization has amplified the phenomenon immeasurably. With armed conflict, human rights violations, political and economic uncertainties, unemployment, the exploitation of the natural resources of Third World countries, climate problems and the relocation of Western firms all contributing to population movements, in 2020, 281 million people left their homelands.

This day underlines the contribution of migrants, their skills and their investments, to the economy. It also provides an opportunity to increase awareness of the difficulties experienced by migrants, such as employment-related discrimination, xenophobia and exploitation.

International Mother Earth Day

Fixed date.

Celebrated for the first time on April 22, 1970, under the name Earth Day, this day offers a chance to recognize the interdependence of the planet, human beings and other living beings. Founded by an environmental and activist movement launched by American senator Gaylord Nelson, this day acquired a global dimension twenty years later, opening the way for the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development in 1992. This founding text underscores the need to find, on behalf of future generations, an equitable balance between economic considerations and the protection of the environment. In 2009, the United Nations established International Mother Earth Day based on indigenous principles concerning the relationship between humans and the Earth.

International Mother Language Day

Fixed date.

“International Mother Language Day was proclaimed by the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in November 1999 (30C/62).

On May 16, 2007, the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution A/RES/61/266 called upon Member States and the Secretariat “to promote the preservation and protection of all languages used by peoples of the world.” By the same resolution, the General Assembly proclaimed 2008 as the International Year of Languages, to promote unity in diversity and international understanding through multilingualism and multiculturalism.

International Mother Language Day has been observed every year since February 2000 to promote linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism. February 21 was chosen as the day in honor of the students who, in 1952, were demonstrating for recognition of their language, Bangla, as one of the two national languages of the then Pakistan, and were shot and killed by police in Dhaka, the capital of what is now Bangladesh.

Languages are the most powerful instruments for preserving and developing our tangible and intangible heritage. All moves to promote the dissemination of mother tongues will serve not only to encourage linguistic diversity and multilingual education but also to develop fuller awareness of linguistic and cultural traditions throughout the world and to inspire solidarity based on understanding, tolerance and dialogue.”

Source: <https://www.un.org/en/observances/mother-language-day>

International Women's Day

Fixed date.

In 1909, the Socialist Party established a National Women's Day in the United States. The following year, the first International Women's Day was celebrated, at the initiative of the Socialist International, a worldwide left-wing organization.

During this period, women were demanding the right to vote, the right to work and the right to wage equity, and were denouncing the exploitation and discrimination to which they were subjected. In 1912, in Lawrence, Massachusetts, women played a decisive role in a famous textile factory strike bearing the slogan "Bread and Roses." As the First World War (1914-1918) neared, women's gatherings became more pacifistic in tone. The war having taken an extremely hard toll on Russia, some women textile workers launched a strike on February 23, 1917 (which is March 8 in the Gregorian calendar), demanding "bread and peace." This demonstration set off a series of events, beginning with the abdication of the tsar a few days later, which were to culminate in the Russian Revolution. The provisional government gave women the right to vote.

In 1921, Lenin proclaimed March 8 International Women's Day. This date was later adopted by the countries of Eastern Europe. In 1977, the General Assembly of the United Nations officially recognized International Women's Day or, rather, United Nations Day for Women's Rights and International Peace. In 1995, the first Women's March Against Poverty, also called "the Bread and Roses March" was organized in Québec. The idea spread and in 2000 a World March of Women Against Poverty and Violence was held. Five years later, in Brazil, a Women's Global Charter for Humanity was launched by a relay march.

These demonstrations and other activities have encouraged national and international authorities to promote justice and women's right to freedom and equality in legal, political and economic terms.

International Workers' Day

Fixed date.

In 1889, the congress of the Second International, a socialist organization meeting in Paris, decided to establish an international workers' day, to be held for the first time the following year. Ever since then, May 1 has been a day for strikes or demands for better working conditions, shorter work hours or more pay.

In Québec, this day, which has coincided for several years with the increase in the minimum wage, remains less popular than [Labour Day](#), a statutory holiday that is celebrated in September. However, the labour federations organize large demonstrations to mark International Workers' Day.

International Youth Day

Fixed date.

On December 17, 1999, the UN General Assembly declared August 12 as International Youth Day. Celebrated throughout the world, this civic holiday puts the spotlight on young people's potential as agents of change in today's society and draws international attention to the challenges and hardships they face. As those who often pay the highest price in situations of conflict and violence, young people are an intrinsic part of any solution in favour of peace.

Journée nationale des patriotes

Variable date, the Monday before May 25.

After the conquest of New France by the British army (1759-1760), the colony was ceded to Great Britain in 1763. Notwithstanding its colonial status, the Québec democracy is one of the oldest in the world, as the Constitutional Act that created Lower Canada (the future Québec) in 1791 provided for an elected parliament.

In 1834, however, social, economic and political injustices led the parliamentary group called the Patriotes, under the leadership of Louis-Joseph Papineau, to adopt 92 resolutions aimed at democratizing the colonial government, which favoured the powerful. After these resolutions were rejected by Britain, popular assemblies began to gather along the St. Lawrence in 1837 and, the following year, the République du Bas-Canada (Republic of Lower Canada) was proclaimed. In response, the government banned these assemblies and issued warrants for the arrest of some Patriote leaders. Resistance movements led to rebellion (1837-1838), beginning with a victory, at Saint Denis, which was followed by defeats at Saint-Charles and Saint-Eustache. The Patriote movement, which focused, in addition to democratic rights, on the defence of the French language and on independence for the colony, nonetheless included followers and leaders of other ethnocultural origins.

From 1838 to 1840, repression was severe (hangings, exile). Lord Durham's report, which supported the Patriotes' critics, recommended the unification of Upper and Lower Canada as a way to assimilate the French culture of the "Canadiens." From 1840 to 1867, Lower Canada (Québec) and Upper Canada (Ontario) formed the colony of United Canada, in which English was the only language of legislation.

In 2002, the government of Québec replaced Dollard Day (or [Victoria Day](#)) by the Journée nationale des patriotes and made it a statutory holiday. This day commemorates the struggle of the Patriotes of 1837-1838 and the democratic ideals they defended.

Journée nationale du vivre-ensemble

Fixed date.

The date of January 15 was chosen to commemorate the Journée nationale du vivre-ensemble in memory of the Québécois who lost their life in terrorists attacks. It is an occasion for Québec to reaffirm the values of openness, respect and solidarity, and the commitment to prevent radicalization leading to violence.

Journées québécoises de la solidarité internationale – Québec International Solidarity Days

Variable dates, in November.

Les Journées québécoises de la solidarité internationale (JQSI) is the name of an annual event that has been organized since 1996 by the Association québécoise des organismes de coopération internationale (AQOCI) with the support of the Ministère des Relations internationales et de la Francophonie du Québec.

The JQSI are 10 days of various awareness-raising and public education activities that take place in many regions of Québec. The objectives of the JQSI are to provide information on current international solidarity issues and to enable Quebecers to learn more about Québec's international cooperation organizations as well as to discover concrete means of action for constructing a fairer and more equitable world.

Labour Day

Variable date, the first Monday in September.

In the late 19th century, industrialization and labour demonstrations led to increasing recognition of the major contribution of workers to the development of societies. In North America, Labour Day, which occurs on the first Monday of September, pays homage to their contribution. In 1894, the Canadian government passed a law making this a statutory holiday. Today, the weekend before Labour Day marks the transition between the summer holidays and the start of the new school, cultural, media, and political year.

Elsewhere in the world, [International Workers' Day](#) (also called Labour Day) is celebrated on May 1.

Magha puja

Variable date, day of the full moon.

(Pali term meaning “rites of the month of Magha”)

Theravada Buddhists commemorate “Sangha Day” on the third full moon in the Buddhist calendar. Long ago, “the day of the fourfold assembly” (or “the gathering of four events”) brought together 1 250 enlightened monks who, although they came from different regions, had set out simultaneously, without prior arrangement, to meet the Buddha in India. On this day of the full moon, the Buddha gave a famous sermon before this large gathering of monks, all of whom he ordained.

In Buddhist countries of Southeast Asia, people celebrate by walking in a circular procession in the temple, with candles, flowers and incense, or by participating in torchlight processions that go from one illuminated temple to another.

Maha Shivaratri

Variable date, day of the new moon.

(Sanskrit term meaning “great night of Shiva”)

Maha Shivaratri celebrates the God Shiva, his wife Parvati and their son, Ganesh. Shiva, generator of spiritual energy and destroyer of obsolete worlds, is the third member of the Hindu trinity (*trimurti*), which includes Brahma and Vishnu.

The custom is to fast all day, and then to take a bath and stay at the temple from midnight until sunrise, performing four *pujas*—prayer rituals and offerings to a divinity. This is the most important celebration in southern India and Sri Lanka for Tamil Hindus. In Québec, in recent years, Maha Shivaratri has been an important event for the Sri-Lankan Tamil community, whose temples remain open all night for the occasion.

Mawlid an-Nabi or Mouloud el-Nabi

Variable date, about 11 days earlier each year. May occur the day after the date indicated, depending on the observation of the moon.

(Arab term meaning “birth of the Prophet”)

Sunni Muslims began celebrating the birth of the prophet Mohammed (570-632), founder of Islam, between three and six centuries after his death, depending on the region. Today the celebration, which is more traditional than religious, is generally marked by a festive family meal.

Among Shia Muslims—who on this day, commemorate the birth of the sixth imam, Jafar as-Sadiq in the year 702—the celebrations are more extravagant, and occur five days later.

National Day for Truth and Reconciliation

Fixed date.

The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is intended to highlight the efforts at reconciliation with the Indigenous peoples in Canada. After being created as a day of commemoration in 2013, it was elevated to a legal holiday and federal statutory holiday in June 2021 (Bill C-5). The creation of this day is a direct response to Call to Action 80 from the report published in 2012 by the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* on the harms caused by residential schools:

“80) We call upon the federal government, in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, to establish, as a statutory holiday, a National Day for Truth and Reconciliation to honour Survivors, their families, and communities, and ensure that public commemoration of the history and legacy of residential schools remains a vital component of the reconciliation process”.

The date was chosen to commemorate the period of the year when children were forcibly removed from their homes and sent to residential schools.

This day is also called “Orange Shirt Day”, related to the story of Phyllis Webstad, a residential school survivor who had her new bright orange shirt confiscated on her first day of school in 1973. This symbol was worn for the first time during the St. Joseph Mission Residential School Commemoration event, held in spring of 2013 at Williams Lake in British Columbia. Orange Shirt Day is an opportunity for First Nations, Métis and Inuit, governments, schools and communities to gather together in a spirit of reconciliation and hope for future generations.

Source: https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Executive_Summary_English_Web.pdf

National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women

Fixed date.

In 1991, the Canadian parliament established a day commemorating the tragic murder in 1989 of 14 women at the École polytechnique de Montréal.

This is a day for collective reflection on violence against women and girls and for discussing concrete measures to end this scourge. This heightened awareness required a rethinking of state and legal structures which, notwithstanding the progress that has been made regarding women’s rights, still leave too much room for impunity and are incapable of ensuring women’s safety and respectful treatment.

Every year, the Fédération des femmes du Québec, with support from various organizations and unions, organizes a public gathering in front of the Montréal courthouse to remember the victims of the École polytechnique and to speak out against violence against women.

National Indigenous Languages Day

Fixed date.

National Indigenous Languages Day was created by the Chiefs-in-Assembly of the Assembly of First Nations in 1989 to create awareness across Canada of the languages of Indigenous peoples, and to build support for their preservation.

Indigenous peoples in Canada celebrate this holiday to highlight and protect Indigenous languages and honour their vitality. Language is a key tool for Indigenous peoples, as it plays a key role in describing concepts, transmitting values, spiritual and traditional beliefs and their entire history from generation to generation. According to the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO), “For indigenous peoples, languages not only identify their origin or membership in a community, they also carry the ethical values of their ancestors – the indigenous knowledge systems that make them one with the land and are crucial to their survival”.

There are around 70 distinct Indigenous languages in Canada, including 11 in Québec, and various dialects. Therefore, this day is an opportunity for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to recognize and highlight the richness and diversity of Indigenous languages.

Source: <https://courier.unesco.org/en/articles/indigenous-languages-knowledge-and-hope>

National Indigenous Peoples Day

Fixed date.

For generations, many Indigenous groups and communities have celebrated their culture and heritage on June 21 because of the significance of the summer solstice as the longest day of the year.

National Indigenous Peoples Day was announced in 1996 by then Governor General of Canada, Roméo LeBlanc, through the *Proclamation Declaring June 21 of Each Year as National Aboriginal Day*. This was the result of consultations and statements of support for such a day made by various Indigenous groups:

- in 1982, the National Indian Brotherhood, now the Assembly of First Nations, called for the creation of National Aboriginal Solidarity Day.
- in 1995, the Sacred Assembly, a national conference of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people chaired by Elijah Harper, called for a national holiday to celebrate the contributions of Indigenous Peoples.
- also in 1995, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recommended the designation of a National First Peoples Day.

National Indigenous Peoples Day is part of the *Celebrate Canada* program, which also includes [Saint-Jean-Baptiste](#) on June 24, Canadian Multiculturalism Day on June 27 and [Canada Day](#) on July 1.

On June 21, for National Indigenous Peoples Day, we recognize and celebrate the history, heritage, resilience and diversity of First Nations, Inuit and Métis across Canada. This day is also an opportunity for the public to learn more about the richness and diversity of Indigenous people's cultural expressions and history.

Source: <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100013718/1534874583157>

National Ribbon Skirt Day

Fixed date.

Since the National Ribbon Skirt Day Act was adopted unanimously by the Parliament of Canada in December 2022, January 4 is known throughout the country as National Ribbon Skirt Day.

The story of its inception can be traced back to Isabella Kulak, a member of the Cote First Nation in Saskatchewan. In 2020, Isabella Kulak wore a handmade ribbon skirt at her elementary school on a day when the students had been invited to wear formal attire. A school staff member told her that her clothing was not sufficiently formal. Isabella was made to feel humiliated for having worn it.

Traditionally worn for centuries by First Nations and Métis women and girls during ceremonies and special events, the ribbon skirt represents the wearer's diversity and unique strength. It is a symbol of the identity, resilience and survival of Indigenous women and girls and of Indigenous persons of various gender identities.

On January 4 of each year, National Ribbon Skirt Day fosters a better understanding and celebration of the importance of Indigenous traditions and forms of cultural expression.

Source: <https://www.parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/44-1/bill/S-219/royal-assent>

Navaratri or Durga Puja

Variable dates, according to the phases of the moon.

(Sanskrit term meaning “nine nights” [navaratri] or the “cult of Durga” [Durga puja])

This celebration of the new moon marks the end of the rainy season in southwestern India. During this period, the three most venerated female gods in the Hindu tradition are honoured by a puja—a ritual involving prayer and offerings (incense, fruit, flowers).

The first three nights are devoted to Durga, the destroyer of demons and of human impurities. The three following nights are dedicated to Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity, and the last three to Sarasvati, the goddess of wisdom, knowledge and the arts. In fact, these three divinities incarnate one and the same goddess (known as “Shakti” or by other names, depending on the region in India) who is called on to overcome obstacles, combat evil and to help people achieve prosperity and acquire knowledge.

On the ninth day, South Indians hold a puja to honour instruments associated with work or learning (vehicles, tools, writing materials, books, musical instruments), so that divine energy will accompany their daily life.

Nelson-Mandela Day

Fixed date.

In June 2015, Québec adopted An Act to proclaim Nelson Mandela Day, to honour Nelson Mandela and pay tribute to this exemplary humanist in Québec, “an open nation and safe haven for all citizens regardless of their origin.” February 11, the day he was freed in 1990, was chosen as the date for Nelson Mandela Day.

The text of the law recalls that Nelson Mandela was president of the Republic of South Africa from May 9, 1994 to June 14, 1999, and that he courageously fought apartheid, a political system of institutional racial segregation, during his 27 long years in prison (1962-1990).

It adds that over the course of his entire life, Mandela showed his great determination to promote the fundamental values of liberty, justice, equality and fraternity between peoples, and that these universal values should be central to all decisions and actions by civil society and government institutions. The Act also mentions that Mandela played a decisive, historic role in the areas of conflict resolution, reconciliation and human rights protection.

Source: <https://www.legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/document/cs/j-1.02>

New Year’s Day

Fixed date (January 14 in some Orthodox churches, according to the Julian calendar).

In the Gregorian calendar, the first day of January marks the beginning of the calendar year, while the Catholic liturgical year begins with Advent. As in all cultures, New Year’s Eve is a time for reflection, when people consider the errors they have made in the course of the previous year and make new plans. The custom is to make resolutions aimed at ending bad habits, which one wishes to relegate to the past.

In the past, **Christmas** was an essentially religious celebration, while people exchanged gifts on New Year’s Day, dressed in new clothes. In Québec, gift giving was assimilated to the Christmas tradition at the beginning of the 1960s.

In Canada, New Year’s Day is part of the magic of the holiday season, a period of celebration that lasts from Christmas to **Epiphany**. It is a time for large gatherings and festive meals where family and friends get together.

O-bon (Ulambana)

Obon is observed on fixed dates, from July 13 to 15 according to the lunar calendar, in the south of Kanto, in Tokyo and Yokohama, and in Tōhoku. Hachigatsu Bon (Bon in August) is more common, and is celebrated from August 13 to 15 according to the solar calendar.

In Japan, where Mahayana Buddhism is practised, Obon is a festival honouring the spirits of the ancestors, who are welcomed with dancing in homes and villages. These three days are not statutory holidays in Japan, but many people take holidays during this time, and some businesses are closed.

Obon has been observed for more than 500 years and was imported from China, where it is called the Ghost Festival. During Obon, people make offerings to the dead to lessen the suffering of their souls. People remember and thank their ancestors for their sacrifices. The festival takes place during Ghost Month, the only time when the dead may return to Earth. This popular festival has evolved through the ages to become a time for family reunions, bringing later generations together on their family's land, although fewer and fewer people take the time to return to their hometown to tend to the tombs of their ancestors. Lanterns are lit in front of each house to guide the spirits of the dead throughout the day.

The most important part of the ritual is the food offering (rice, vegetables, fruit, cake, flowers, etc.), which symbolizes sharing. Although Obon is a solemn, religious festival, it is also an occasion for joyful reunions.

Palm Sunday

Variable date, the Sunday before Easter.

Seven days before [Easter](#), all Christians celebrate the Holy Week, which commemorates Jesus' last days on earth, from His entry into Jerusalem to His burial. On this Sunday, the faithful recall Jesus' triumphal arrival in Jerusalem on a donkey, while people laid clothing and palm fronds on the ground all along his route to honour him. At church, palm branches are blessed. Once wilted, they will be burned and used as ashes on [Ash Wednesday](#) the following year.

Parinirvana

Fixed date (also celebrated by some Buddhists on February 8).

This celebration, called “Nirvana Day,” commemorates the death of Buddha while he meditated under a tree. According to the Buddhist tradition, the Indian prince Siddhartha Gautama achieved enlightenment, or the state of nirvana, in his lifetime (see [Bodhi Day](#)) and experienced full nirvana at the time of his death, which means that he was completely freed from karma and the cycle of the transmigration of souls. Buddhists believe that souls, while waiting to escape from the cycle of transmigration, continue to be reborn on earth until they achieve enlightenment.

In the temples, people meditate on the teachings of the Buddha. Depending on the school of thought, Parinirvana may be celebrated on February 8 or 15, the latter date being more common.

Pavarana

Variable date, the day of the full moon.

(Pali term meaning “inviting admonition”)

Following the eighth full moon in the Buddhist calendar, some monks undertake a three-month retreat during the monsoon, during which they engage in rigorous spiritual practices, including the observation of complete silence. At the end of the rainy season, on the occasion of the 11th full moon, the great celebration of Pavarana marks the monks’ return to public and community life, which is delayed if the rainy season persists. On Pavarana, each monk asks the other monks to tell him of any way in which his behaviour can be improved. The celebration recalls the experience of the first disciples of Buddha, who later spread his teachings throughout the world.

Pentecost

Variable date, the seventh Sunday after Easter (the date varies in some Orthodox churches, according to the Julian calendar).

(from the ancient Greek *pentekôstè*, meaning “fiftieth [day]”)

On the day of his ascension, Jesus promised his disciples that he would help them endure till the end. Ten days later, fifty days after [Easter](#), the Holy Spirit (the third person in the Christian Trinity, the others being God the Father and Christ the Son) appeared to the apostles in the form of tongues of fire, and in response they ran through the streets of Jerusalem, relating the message of resurrection in all languages.

On the seventh Sunday after Easter, Christians of all confessions celebrate the manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

Persian New Year – Norouz or Nowruz

Variable date, around the time of the spring equinox, between March 19 and March 22.

(Persian term meaning “new light”, “new day”)

The Persian New Year, which has its roots in the ancient Zoroastrian tradition, has been celebrated for at least 3 000 years. Timed to coincide with the spring equinox, a symbol of renewal, it is based on one of the world’s first solar calendars. Today, Nowruz marks the arrival of spring, and is celebrated by peoples related to the Persians (such as the Kurds and Afghans) as well as the neighbouring peoples who speak languages belonging to the Turkic language family (Turks, Kazakhs and Mongols).

The celebrations last several days before and after the New Year. In addition to the traditional spring-cleaning and visits to family and friends, Nowruz is a time to perform good deeds. In the days preceding Norouz, people light small bonfires in the streets to chase out the sufferings of the past year, chanting: “I give you my yellow (pale, wan colour, illness), give me your red (health, strength).”

March 21 is officially recognized by the United Nations as **International Nowruz Day**.

Pessah (or Pesach or Pessa’h) – Passover

Variable dates.

(Hebrew term meaning “passing over”, “Exodus”)

Passover commemorates the Exodus, that is, the emigration of the Hebrews from Pharaoh’s Egypt after two centuries of slavery. Just before their liberation, the Angel of Death, who had taken all the firstborn Egyptian sons, had flown—“passed”—over the homes of the Hebrews without harming them, sparing them the ravages of the tenth plague sent to the Egyptians. Led by Moses, the Hebrews fled so rapidly that they did not have time to let their bread rise, and had only unleavened bread to take with them. The Exodus ended with the crossing of the Red Sea, which marked the passage from the land of slavery to the promised land. This journey led to the birth of the people of Israel, and is recounted in Exodus, the second book of the Bible.

In preparation for Pesach, a major celebration lasting eight days, the house is thoroughly cleaned. On the first evening, families gather for the *seder*, a ritual meal featuring foods that symbolize moments or aspects of the Exodus, including unleavened bread called *matzoh* and lamb.

Purim

Variable date.

(Akkadian term meaning “fate”, “chance”)

This day, which recalls the joy of delivery from mortal danger, commemorates the tale told in the book of Esther, in the Hebrew Bible. The story begins about 480 BCE, at a time when Judea had been conquered by the Persian empire. It tells how Esther, wife of the Persian king Xerxes, miraculously foiled a plot devised by the king’s minister Haman, to exterminate the Jewish population. Haman planned to choose the day of the massacre by casting lots.

Children dress up in costumes as part of the celebration. Originally, the costumes were based on the characters in the story of Esther. Today, the costumes follow the children’s imagination.

In the synagogue, the Book of Esther is read. Every time the name of Haman is mentioned, people stamp their feet, shake rattles and boo, which amuses the young children. Other Purim customs include preparing a feast, giving alms to the poor as a sign of solidarity with those facing adversity and eating triangular pastries called *Hamantaschen* (“Haman’s pockets”) or *Oznei Haman* (“Haman’s ears”).

In present-day Québec, children who attend Jewish schools or are going to synagogue can be seen wearing costumes on this day.

Québec’s Week of Intercultural Encounters

Variable dates, usually in October or November.

Established in 2003, Québec’s Week of Intercultural Encounters highlights the importance of encouraging the discovery and the bringing together of different cultures by means of encounters and dialogue. This is a unique opportunity to highlight the contribution of Quebecers of all origins to Québec’s economic, social and cultural development.

This week also gives the Québec government a chance to reaffirm its commitment to offering all citizens the same opportunities to succeed, by encouraging them to learn French, the common language, by improving access to employment and by combating all forms of discrimination.

Rama Navami

Variable date.

(Sanskrit term meaning “ninth day of Rama,” that is, the “ninth day of the lunar month devoted to Rama”)

This festival celebrates the birth and story of Rama, seventh avatar (earthly manifestation) of the great God Vishnu (Rama Navami). In the temple or at home, people recite, over a period of nine days, the seven volumes of the *Ramayana*, a monumental masterpiece of Indian literature, written in the third century BCE. People also attend theatre performances (*Ramlila*) illustrating highlights of the life of Rama and his wife, Sita, as related in the *Ramayana*. The temples set up a statue of the infant Rama in his crib for the occasion, to which the faithful present offerings.

In recent years, Québec’s Hindu community has celebrated Rama Navami by reciting sacred texts and decorating the temples, and by staging theatre performances.

Ras el-Am el-Hejri (or 1st Moharam) – Muslim New Year

Variable date, about 11 days earlier each year. May occur the day after the date indicated, depending on the observation of the moon.

(Arab term meaning “head of the year”)

This celebration marks the first day of the Muslim lunar year. It is sometimes called “Moharam,” because it coincides with the first day of the Muslim month with the same name. *Ras el-Am* is the abbreviated form of *Ras el-Am el-Hejri*, which translates literally as “head of the year of the Hegira” (from the Arab *hijri*, referring to the idea of emigration). The reference is to Mohammed’s departure, in 622, from Mecca, where he was not well accepted as a prophet. He then emigrated, with about 100 companions, to Yatrib (now called Medina) where he founded a new society. This was the beginning of a new era: the Hegira.

The Muslim New Year is not a day of great celebration. Traditionally, it is marked by a festive family meal. In the Maghreb, it is the custom to keep coloured candles burning until midnight.

Red Hand Day – International Day Against the Use of Child Soldiers

Fixed date.

In recent decades, armed conflicts have resulted in increasing numbers of civilian victims, half of whom have been children. In the first ten years of this millennium, two million children have been killed on battlefields and over six million have been seriously wounded. During the same period, one million children have been abandoned, their parents having been killed or separated from them while fleeing violence.

According to United Nations sources, there are more than 300 000 child soldiers in the world. Most have been recruited by force by militias and armies or have been obliged to take part in the hostilities. Often, those who volunteer seek vengeance or an escape from violence or poverty.

In 2000, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, on the involvement of children in armed conflict. (An optional protocol is a legal provision that completes or reinforces human rights instruments.) This protocol established 15 years as the minimum age for voluntary recruitment into armed forces or groups and 18 years as the minimum age for compulsory recruitment and direct participation in hostilities. It came into force on February 12, 2002, the date chosen for the International Day Against the Use of Child Soldiers.

Remembrance Day

Fixed date.

The First World War (1914-1918) ended with the signing of the armistice, which came into effect on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month. In Europe and the allied countries, this historic moment, together with the armistice ending the Second World War, is celebrated on November 11 every year.

Wreaths of flowers are laid on war memorials (cenotaphs), and commemorative ceremonies are held to honour the memory of soldiers who died in combat and the sacrifice of veterans. The tradition is to observe two minutes of silence on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month.

In Canada, poppy pins are sold at this time of year to raise money for veterans. The poppy, symbol of Remembrance Day, recalls the blood red poppies growing in the battlefields during the war. Many villages and towns in Québec organize a ceremony honouring the soldiers who perished in conflicts in which Canada participated (Crimean War, Boer War, Korean War, world wars).

Rosh Hashanah – Jewish New Year

Variable dates.

(Hebrew term meaning “head of the year”)

This celebration marks the beginning (head) of the Jewish year and commemorates the first day of the creation of the world, of which God is king. After a month of self-examination and repentance for wrongs done to others, it is during Rosh Hashanah, day of judgment, that God divides all people into three categories—the wicked, the good and the in-between—according to their actions during the previous year. God’s judgment in the book will be sealed on **Yom Kippur** and, because the Jews cannot know which judgment has been passed on them, they engage in a further ten-day period of contrition (the “Days of Awe”) to prove the sincerity of their repentance

On Rosh Hashanah, Jews do not work. They spend the day in prayer and contemplation. The family usually celebrates together. In synagogue services, the shofar (ram’s horn) is blown to call Jews to repent for their sins in order to begin the year properly. At home, on both evenings, the family meal features foods that symbolize pardon, sweetness and prosperity (dates, pomegranates, apples, honey and the head of a ram).

Shavuot

Variable dates.

(Hebrew term meaning “weeks”)

According to the Torah, Shavuot is one of the five celebrations the faithful are required to observe (the others are **Rosh Hashanah**, **Yom Kippur**, **Sukkot** and **Pesach**), although Shavuot is the least popular of the five. This festival, which originally marked the completion of a seven-week grain harvest, is also called “the gift of the Torah,” as it commemorates the day on which Moses received the Torah on Mount Sinai. On that day, the Jews had to eat only dairy foods, as it was not possible to eat kosher meat.

For Jews, the Torah constitutes the Word of God; it contains His ten commandments, establishes the rules of religious life, especially with regard to kosher dietary law and frees human beings from mundane preoccupations. It is also the name of the first and oldest part of the Old Testament.

This celebration marks the beginning of the wheat harvest. In ancient times, Jews offered part of their harvest to the Temple of Jerusalem. Today, they decorate schools and synagogues with fruit and leaves. For symbolic reasons, on the first day of Shavuot, foods based on dairy products are consumed, such as cheese, falafel with yogurt, and cheesecake.

Sikh New Year

Fixed date.

This day marks the beginning of the new liturgical year for Sikhs and the moment when Guru Har Rai Sahib (1630-1661) acquired the title of seventh spiritual leader (see [Birthday of Guru Nanak](#)). [Vaisakhi](#), however, remains the most important Sikh celebration.

Spring Equinox

Variable date, often March 20, sometimes March 19.

The Equinox is a point in Earth's orbit that is reached when the sun is at its zenith. The spring equinox occurs in March in the northern hemisphere and in September in the southern hemisphere. At this exact moment, day and night are of equal duration. The day after the spring equinox, the days become increasingly longer than the nights.

St-Jean-Baptiste – Québec’s National Holiday

Fixed date.

The summer solstice has been celebrated in Europe since prehistoric times. At the time of the Gauls, the bonfires of the solstice were associated with Belenos (“brilliant”), the god of sunlight.

Although the Gauls were Christianized in the 5th century, the celebration retained its pagan character. It was renamed Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day for Jesus’ cousin John the Baptist, who was six months older than him, Jesus’ birthday coinciding with the Winter Solstice, and that of John with the Summer Solstice. In the 1630s, in New France, cannon and musket shots were fired to launch the celebrations.

In France, this was a very popular official holiday until 1801. In the early 17th century, the king himself lit the Saint-Jean bonfire. The custom of having bonfires on Saint-Jean disappeared under Napoleon in France, but in the colony this holiday was celebrated after the Conquest as an affirmation of the Canadiens’ French heritage.

On June 24, 1834, at a Patriote banquet in Montréal, during a period marked by social and economic difficulties, Ludger Duvernay founded the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste and declared John the Baptist the patron saint of the Canadiens. The holiday, henceforth a symbol of national resilience, spread rapidly through United Canada in the 1840s. Although Duvernay had emphasized the patriotic aspect of the celebration, the Catholic church underscored the religious dimension, accompanying it with a mass and a procession.

On the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste, the holiday was celebrated on a major scale; sixty thousand people took part in the first parade with allegorical floats. In 1908, the Pope officially proclaimed St. John the Baptist the patron saint of French Canadians.

In 1925, the Saint-Jean became an official statutory holiday in Québec, and, 52 years later, the government made June 24 Québec’s national holiday. Although people still wish each other a Happy Saint-Jean, June 24 gradually lost its religious connotation in the late 1960s and became a day of celebration for all Quebecers.

St. Patrick's Day

Fixed date.

St. Patrick was a Christian missionary who played a major role in the conversion of the Irish population in the 5th century. He explained the mystery of the Holy Trinity using the cloverleaf, or shamrock, which became a popular symbol of Catholic Ireland. He is believed to have died on March 17. St. Patrick's Day was already celebrated in the 9th century, but it was not included in the liturgical calendar until the 17th century.

In Ireland, this religious celebration has been recognized as a statutory holiday since 1903. To celebrate it, people wear a shamrock in their buttonhole in memory of the saint's teachings of the trinity. Although St. Patrick's Day is not the official national holiday of the country, the government of the Irish Republic, which became a sovereign state in 1937, has made it an annual festival of Irish culture.

Some 445 000 Quebecers—mainly Francophones and Catholics—are of Irish origin. Their ancestors settled in Montréal and in several rural regions. Since the 19th century, St. Patrick's Day has taken the form of a national celebration in Montréal; it is marked by a big parade, where the shamrock and the colour green are on display.

It welcomes diversity—everyone can be Irish on this day. There have been other parades in recent years, such as the one in Richmond, in the Eastern Townships, and in Québec City. In addition, in Québec, the last snowstorm of the year is called a “St. Patrick's Storm.”

Sukkot

Variable dates.

(Hebrew term meaning “tents”, “huts”, “temporary shelters”)

This festival, which coincides with the end of the harvest, recalls the 40 years the Hebrews spent wandering in the desert after leaving Egypt. They lived in tents (sukkah, in the singular; sukkot, in the plural) under God's benevolent care.

Using branches, families build a sukkah outside in which they will eat and sleep whenever possible. The children help decorate the sukkah, which should be lively and colourful. The ornaments, generally fruit and other plants, have a rich symbolic value, recalling the story in the Bible. Sukkot, [Pesach](#) and [Shavuot](#) are referred to as celebrations of pilgrimage.

In several districts of Montréal, from Côte-Saint-Luc to Outremont, sukkot have been observed in recent years, erected in backyards or gardens and on balconies.

Summer Solstice

Variable date: often June 21, sometimes June 20 or 22.

The summer solstice occurs when the sun reaches its highest point in the sky relative to the stars. In the Northern hemisphere, it is the day with the largest number of hours of sunlight and thus the longest day. The phenomenon is more pronounced in the far north, as the difference in the duration of night and day increases with distance from the equator.

The solstice has been celebrated both by the Aboriginal peoples of North America and by the ancestors of the Europeans (see [Québec's National Holiday](#)) since time immemorial.

Thanksgiving (Canada)

Variable date, second Monday in October.

In the first five books of the Bible (the Jewish Bible), and in the Christian New Testament, the faithful express their thanks to God for his bounty and benevolent help by means of prayers of thanksgiving. Following the example of the Jewish celebration of [Sukkot](#), which offers praises to the Lord, Thanksgiving too, thanks God for abundant harvests.

Although prayers of thanksgiving were offered in New France as early as 1604, at the time of Samuel de Champlain, the Thanksgiving celebration was brought to Québec by Loyalists fleeing the American Revolution (1776-1783). In the 19th century, collective ceremonies were held from time to time to thank God for ending an epidemic, for example, or for restoring peace (Patriotes' Rebellion, Crimean War) or to highlight royal events. At the century's end, Thanksgiving once again became a seasonal celebration to thank God for abundant harvests and for peace, based on the model of the American Thanksgiving. Today, some churches are still decorated for the occasion with horns of abundance and fall vegetables.

In 1879, the Canadian parliament made Thanksgiving a national holiday, celebrated every year in October or November. It was only in 1957 that the second Monday in October was chosen as the official date.

Today, notwithstanding the tradition of giving thanks to God, Thanksgiving's religious aspect is less prominent, and this celebration is primarily about sharing a traditional family meal featuring fall vegetables (pumpkin, squash, corn) and turkey (or ham) with cranberries.

Thanksgiving (United States)

Variable date, the fourth Thursday in November.

(English term meaning “giving thanks”)

Thanksgiving Day, which is celebrated on the fourth Thursday in November in the United States, commemorates the very first harvest, in 1621, of the English colonists who had settled in New England. These Pilgrim fathers were religious dissidents who had come to Massachusetts on the famous ship the *Mayflower* to found the colony of Plymouth in 1620. They survived thanks to the help of the Indigenous people, who gave them food and taught them how to cultivate sweet potatoes and pumpkins and to hunt wild turkey.

Thanksgiving, marked by three days of festivities, became an official holiday in 1863, under the government of Abraham Lincoln, during the Civil War. The traditional Thanksgiving meal includes roast turkey and pumpkin pie.

Theophany

Fixed date (January 19 in some Orthodox churches, according to the Julian calendar).

(from the Greek term *theophania*, meaning “appearance of god”)

This celebration is the Orthodox equivalent of the Catholic **Epiphany**. It commemorates the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist in the waters of the Jordan, where it was revealed that he was the son of God.

In Russia, the faithful bathe in ice holes made in rivers, carved in the form of the cross (*yourdan*). Near Moscow, tens of thousands of believers take this icy bath.

United Nations Day

Fixed date.

In 1945, at the end of the Second World War, representatives of 50 countries established the United Nations with the aim of maintaining world peace.

The organization’s founding document, the Charter of the United Nations, defines the rights and obligations of the member states, the rules governing the relations among nations, the powers of certain bodies (such as the Security Council) and the status of the International Court of Justice. On October 24th of that year, the definitive version of the Charter came into force.

Since 1948, the ratification of the Charter is celebrated every year in order to familiarize people with the aims of the United Nations and with its achievements in the areas of peace, human rights, cooperation, development and women’s autonomy. Today, 193 countries are members of the United Nations.

Universal Children’s Day

Fixed date.

On November 20, 1959, 11 years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations adopted the first Declaration of the Rights of the Child. In 1989, exactly 30 years later, the General Assembly of the United Nations ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and proposed that November 20 be declared Universal Children’s Day.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, consisting of 54 articles, was signed by 191 countries. It affirmed the principle of the “best interests of the child” and recognized, among other things, the right of children to express their opinions and to be protected, educated, and taken care of without discrimination.

Vaisakhi

Variable date, usually April 13, but sometimes April 14.

(term derived from the Sanskrit *Vaisakha*, which designates the current month in the Buddhist lunisolar calendar)

Vaisakhi marks the first day of the Hindu solar New Year, and coincides with the harvest season in the Indian state of Punjab, where the great majority of Sikhs live. It commemorates the creation, in 1699, of the Khalsa religious order by the tenth and final founding spiritual leader of Sikhism, Guru Gobind Singh. This order imposes certain rules on its members, such as vegetarianism, wearing the kirpan (ceremonial dagger) and never cutting one’s hair.

Many believers choose the Vaisakhi festival as the moment to make an official commitment to Sikhism by undergoing the Amrit Sanskar ceremony of baptism and initiation. They gather at the Golden Temple, in Amritsar, or in some other holy site. Local temples also hold festivities.

In recent years, the Sikh community in the district of LaSalle, in Montréal, has celebrated Vaisakhi by organizing a procession (Nagar Kirtan) with allegorical floats. The faithful follow a covered wagon containing the sacred book of the Sikhs (Guru Granth Sahib). However, because of Québec’s climate at this time of year, the parade is usually held in late May on a Sunday.

Valentine's Day

Fixed date.

At first glance, the well-known festival of love has little to do with the martyr Saint Valentine. We must bear in mind that the ancient Romans celebrated the Lupercalia, the festival of Lupercus, the God of fertility, from February 13 to 15. February (from the Latin februius) was also devoted to Junon Februata, Goddess of fertility and purification. This month, which marked the end of winter and of the Roman year, was considered an appropriate time to clean and prepare for the spring renewal.

Around 498, under the Christianized Roman Empire, Pope Gelasius I chose February 14 to celebrate Valentine's Day, and over time, Saint Valentine became the patron saint of couples.

It was only at the end of the Middle Ages that this festival began to focus on love. In the 19th century, February 14 was the day people sent messages to their beloved, and out of this tradition grew that of sending Valentine's Day cards, which were initially made out of lace paper, and later of printed paper. The cards were presented together with flowers or heart-shaped boxes of chocolate (invented in 1868 by the chocolate maker Richard Cadbury), with an abundance of red hearts.

Today, under the American influence, people send Valentine's Day cards to their loved one, but also to close friends. At school, students make their own cards.

Vesak or Buddha Purnima

Variable date, day of the full moon.

(contraction of the Pali term Visakha, derived from the Sanskrit Vaisakha, which designates the current month of the Buddhist lunisolar calendar. Buddha Purnima means “full moon of the Buddha.”)

Buddhism was the result of the spiritual path followed by Siddhârta Gautama, who became the Buddha (“the Awakened (or Enlightened) One”). Since the 1950s, on the May full moon (vesakha), Buddhists have joined together to celebrate Buddha Day, the only celebration shared by Buddhists of all traditions.

Mahayana Buddhists mark only the Buddha’s birthday on this occasion, his two other paths being celebrated at other times in the year (see [Bodhi Day](#) and [Parinirvana](#)). In Vietnam, this celebration is known as Phat Dan. For Theravada Buddhists, this day celebrates the birth, the awakening (achievement of nirvana) and the death of the Buddha (the parinirvana), the three steps having occurred on the same day according to this tradition. The ritual of Vesak (Vesak puja) is called Visakha Bochea in Cambodia and Visakha Bouxa in Laos.

To symbolize illumination, houses and temples are lit up with lanterns, and the faithful organize candlelight processions. This celebration allows them to express their faith and reiterate their vows. Its observation thus takes the form of pious practices, such as abstaining from meat, showing compassion and trying to help the elderly or those who are ill. According to tradition, the temples are decorated with lamps, balloons and flowers. People offer monks rice and prepare a variety of dishes. The celebration ends in the evening with colourful processions.

In Québec, in recent years, this day has been celebrated by Buddhists, but also by local non-Buddhists who value the teachings of the Buddha.

Victoria Day

Variable date, the Monday before May 25.

On May 24, 1845, the colony established an annual holiday to celebrate the birthday of Queen Victoria, who headed the British Empire from 1819 to 1901. Although English Canada continues to mark this date, it is no longer a holiday in Great Britain. In Canada, it celebrates the birthday of the reigning sovereign, who is currently Queen Elizabeth II. Since 1957, Victoria Day has been held on the Monday before May 25. It is a statutory holiday.

In Québec, this holiday was traditionally known as Dollard Day, after Dollard des Ormeaux, a mythic figure in the history of New France. In 2002, it was officially renamed [Journée nationale des patriotes](#).

Winter Solstice

Variable date: often December 21, sometimes December 22.

(derived from the Latin terms *sol*, meaning “sun,” and *stare*, meaning “stop”)

The winter solstice occurs when the sun is at its lowest point in the sky relative to the stars. It is thus the shortest day in the Northern hemisphere. The phenomenon is more noticeable in northern regions, because the difference in the duration of day and night increases with distance from the Equator.

Women’s History Month

In 2012, Canada declared October women’s history month. This is an opportunity to highlight women’s contribution in all areas of activity: health, sciences, politics, the arts, sports, economics, and so on, and also to recognize the role of women who have distinguished themselves in the course of history, and to measure their progress toward winning civil rights (see [International Women’s Day](#), March 8).

Civil rights are basic freedoms that are often hard won before being protected by laws against injustice and discrimination. For example, women had to fight for legal recognition of their right to vote, legal status and equality with men, especially in the workplace (access to the same jobs, with equal pay).

World Day for African and Afrodescendant Culture

Fixed date.

At the 40th Session of its General Conference in 2019, UNESCO adopted January 24 as World Day for African and Afrodescendant Culture. This date coincides with the adoption, in 2006, by the Heads of State and Government of the African Union, of the *Charter for African Cultural Renaissance*.

This international event celebrates the diversity and vitality of the African continent and its diasporas throughout the world. The day is also an opportunity to promote African and Afrodescendant cultures as means to strengthen intercultural dialogue, social equality and international cooperation.

Source: <https://www.unesco.org/en/days/african-culture>

World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development

Fixed date.

In the wake of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, adopted in 2001, the United Nations declared, in 2002, May 21 World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development. The aim is to encourage reflection on the values associated with cultural diversity, considered as a shared human heritage.

To ensure that globalization does not result in the uniformity of cultures, it is suggested that, on this day, countries adopt measures and policies defending indigenous peoples and ethnocultural and linguistic minorities. The aim is to protect and strengthen diversity, particularly cultural diversity. The recognition of this diversity may be achieved by means of intercultural dialogue, which is a first step towards mutual understanding. This day is a day for discussion and reflection on the contributions of all cultures to the human community.

World Humanitarian Day

Fixed date.

On December 11, 2008, the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 63/139, designating August 19 as World Humanitarian Day to pay tribute to aid workers and to rally support for their actions throughout the world.

On August 19, 2003, a terrorist attack hit the United Nations headquarters in Iraq, killing 22 people. A number of other humanitarian aid workers also perished before that date. The greatest loss was recorded in January 2010 following the earthquake in Haiti. World Humanitarian Day originated in Iraq. The goal is to put the spotlight on the global humanitarian community. Humanitarian aid workers can be found all over the world, sometimes risking their lives, often working in complete anonymity. Their painstaking work is indispensable and often helps people to regain a minimum degree of dignity.

World Refugee Day

Fixed date.

According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, refugee status applies to anyone who, “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself [or herself] of the protection of that country.”

In late 2022, about 108.4 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public orders.

Québec participates in the international solidarity efforts to protect people in distress and subscribes to the objectives of the international agreements that protect these people. Every year, Québec welcomes several thousand refugees and asylum seekers.

From 2011 to 2017, the Québec jurist François Crépeau was elected United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, a position created in 1999 by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

Source: <https://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendocPDFViewer.html?docid=3b66c2aa10&query=convention%20refugees%201954b>

Yom Kippur

Variable date.

(Hebrew term meaning “Day of Atonement”)

The Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) is the holiest and most important Jewish celebration of the year. To expiate the sin of worshipping the golden calf, recounted in the Bible, Jews devote this day entirely to reflection and repentance.

After Moses had freed the Hebrews (Jews) from slavery in Pharaonic Egypt, the Jewish people wandered around Mount Sinai for 40 years before they entered the land of Israel. During this exile, they were at one point tempted to practise paganism by worshipping a golden calf (see [Pesach](#) and [Shavuot](#)).

Yom Kippur is a day of total fasting, when the faithful avoid their regular activities and engage in reflection and self-examination. It is a window of opportunity when God gives people a second chance at forgiveness. People pray, recognize their faults and seek forgiveness from those they have wronged. Some spend the whole day in synagogue. As at [Rosh Hashanah](#), the shofar (ram’s horn) is blown. Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah are called austere celebrations, because they require deep reflection.

Your comments and suggestions are welcome!

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