

Religious Holidays Cheat Sheet

Version 3.0

Holidays are ordered roughly chronologically by their common dates or, for multi-day holidays, when they commonly begin. Many of these holidays move in relation to the western calendar.

Bolded terms appear frequently in questions.

Spring Holiday	Details
Purim Judaism	the " feast of lots " celebrating the victory of Esther , the Jewish queen married to the Persian king Ahasuerus , and her cousin Mordecai over Haman ; the Megillah (scroll) of Esther is read, and listeners shout to drown out the name of Haman; adults may drink until they cannot distinguish between the names of Mordecai and Haman; mischloach manot gift baskets are given
Holi Hinduism	Festival of Colors during which colored powders and dyes are thrown to celebrate Prahlada's rescue by Narasimha, an avatar of Vishnu, who saved him from being burned alive for the crime of worshipping the gods instead of Prahlada's father
Lent Christianity	a forty-day period immediately preceding Easter, during which adherents may fast, partially fast, or give up vices; the final week, Holy Week , includes Good Friday ; begins on Ash Wednesday
Ramadan Islam	month during which able-bodied adherents fast between sunrise and sunset; includes Laylat al-Qadr ; suhoor is the meal eaten before first prayer each day of Ramadan, and iftar is the meal eaten after sundown; Shawwal, the month after Ramadan, begins with feasting on Eid al-Fitr
Passover Judaism	celebration of the Exodus from Egypt on the fifteenth day of the month of Nisan ; begins with the Passover Seder , a meal in which the youngest family member asks questions, including " Why is this night different from all other nights? " to retell the story of the exodus; matzah is eaten; Dayenu and Chad Gadya are sung
Easter Christianity	spring holiday celebrating the resurrection of Jesus ; date is set by the "computus," since the First Council of Nicaea wanted to separate Easter from the Jewish date of Passover; the Exsultet is sung; also called Pascha
Laylat al-Qadr Islam	the " Night of Power " during Ramadan on which the angel Jibreel (Gabriel) began revealing the Quran to Muhammad
Eid al-Fitr Islam	feast day on the first day of the month of Shawwal, the month after Ramadan ; the "Lesser Eid"
Summer Holiday	Details
Eid al-Adha Islam	"feast of sacrifice" that celebrates Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice Ismail on the tenth day of the month of Dhul al-Hijjah; the " Greater Eid ;" occurs at the end of the hajj
Autumn Holiday	Details
Rosh Hashanah Judaism	new year festival on the first day of the month of Tishrei ; the first of the High Holy Days or "Days of Awe;" the shofar , a ram's horn, is blown one hundred times; apples dipped in honey are eaten to guarantee a "sweet" new year; also called Yom Teruah
Yom Kippur Judaism	Day of Atonement on the tenth day of the month of Tishrei ; the tenth and last of the High Holy Days or "Days of Awe;" the Book of Jonah is read in its entirety; the song Kol Nidre is sung; adherents obey the five prohibitions against engaging in pleasures or excesses; the origin of the scapegoat tradition
Diwali Hinduism	autumnal " festival of lights " that celebrates the successful return of Rama and Sita after the events of the Ramayana, and honors Lakshmi , the goddess of wealth and commerce; celebrated with rangoli (elaborate chalk designs), diya lamps, and fireworks; includes Bhai Dooj, a celebration of siblinghood, during which sisters feed their brothers food (note that many communities also hold Bhai Dooj celebrations after Holi)
Winter Holiday	Details
Hanukkah Judaism	winter " festival of lights " celebrating the aftermath of the Maccabean Revolt against Antiochus IV, led by Judah Maccabee; the eight lower branches of a specialized menorah called a hanukkiah are lit over the course of eight nights with a central shamash candle; the song Ma'oz Tzur is sung; celebrated by eating fried foods like latke or sufganiyot, and by playing with a dreidel , a four-sided top marked with the letters nun, gimel, hei, and shin
Christmas Christianity	winter holiday celebrating the birth of Jesus ; Nativity statue groups and Nativity plays reenact a tableau of Jesus's birth; twelve days before Epiphany