

Celebrate Winter Around the World

Winter is a busy time for celebrations. Most people in Canada are familiar with holidays such as Christmas and New Years, but have you ever wondered how other cultures celebrate? Try some of these activities to find out!

Diwali

Also known as the festival of lights and is one of the most beautiful of Indian festivals. Diwali (pronounced di-vollee) is a 5 day Hindu festival in India which occurs on the fifteenth day of Kartika. It started on the 4th of November in 2002. The date of Diwali is set by the Hindu lunar calendar and so it varies in the Western calendar but it usually falls in October or November. It celebrates the return of Rama to Ayodhya after his 14-year exile. Gifts are exchanged and sweets and festive meals are prepared. Countless flickering oil lamps and lights are lit in houses all over the country.

Day 1 – Worships Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. Play a board game such as “Monopoly” or “Careers”. Make a bank to save money in. Collect funds for the Canadian World Friendship Fund. Create your own “rangoli” artwork.

Day 2 – Worships Kali, the goddess of strength. Play some active games. Try skipping using rhymes from around the world.

Day 3 – Last day of the lunar year. Lamps are lit to symbolize the purpose of the festival and serve as a reminder during the coming year. Make and light tin can lanterns or decorated candles.

Day 4 – First day of new lunar year. Old business accounts are settled. Ceremonies are held to remove anger, hate and jealousy from participants’ lives. Make friendship bracelets and trade them. Write and send greetings to a group in another province or country.

Day 5 – Celebrates Bali, an ancient king remembered for his generosity. Do a small service project to help others in your community, such as collecting food bank donations.

Foods to try – Seviyan Keer, Badaam Barfi

Ramadan

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Moslem calendar. The timing of the celebration is based on the Islamic calendar, and its start day depends on the sighting of the moon and so it can be celebrated in November, December,

January, or February. It is during this month that Moslems fast during the daylight hours. It is called the Fast of Ramadan and lasts the entire month. It is a time of worship and contemplation and a time to strengthen family and community ties.

Fasting – practised as a method of learning self-control. Fasting is also a way of experiencing hunger and developing sympathy for the less fortunate. Serve a “hunger meal” of a small amount of plain rice, beans, or other simple food. Discuss how it feels to go hungry, and how many children experience this feeling every day. Play an awareness game such as “The Peanut Butter Dilemma”.

Special Food – Dates. It is a common practice for Muslims to break their fast at sunset with dates (*iftar*), following the custom of Prophet Muhammad. This is followed by the sunset prayer, which is followed by dinner.

Phrases to try. Muslims use many phrases in various languages to congratulate one another for the completion of the obligation of fasting and the 'Eid-ul-Fitr festival. Here is a sampling of them:

"Kullu am wa antum bi-khair" (May you be well throughout the year) - Arabic

"Atyab at-tihani bi-munasabat hulul shahru Ramadan al-Mubarak" (The most precious congratulations on the occasion of the coming of Ramadan) - Arabic

"Elveda, ey Ramazan" (Farewell, O Ramadan) - Turkish

"Kullu am wa antum bi-khair" (May you be well throughout the year) - Arabic

"Eid mubarak (A Blessed 'Eid)" - universal

Kwanzaa

Kwanzaa is a 7 day festival celebrating the African American people, their culture and their history. Each day represents one of the seven reasons or principles of Kwanzaa. It is a time of celebration, community gathering, and reflection which begins on December 26th and continues until New Years Day, January 1st. Kwanzaa is a Swahili (an East African language) word that means "first fruits of the harvest."

Seven Principles of Kwanzaa:

Umoja or Unity

Kujichagulia or Self-Determination

Ujima or Collective Work and Responsibility

Ujamaa or Cooperative Economics

Nia or Purpose

Kuumba or Creativity

Imani or Faith

Decorations – Mkeka (straw mats), ears of corn, and candles (one black, three red & four green). Weave your own Kwanzaa mat with black, red, and green construction paper. Cover it with clear mactac to protect it and make a lasting placemat.

Games – Play Mancala, a traditional game which originated in Africa.

Hanukkah

Hanukkah (or Chanukah) is the Hebrew word for dedication. It celebrates the liberation of Jerusalem and the rededication of the Temple. When the Hebrews were preparing to rededicate the Temple, they only found enough oil for the Temple lamp for one day. According to legend, the oil lasted for eight days. The lighting of candles for eight consecutive nights has become the traditional way to celebrate Hanukkah. Hanukkah is celebrated the 24th night of the Jewish month of Kislev (Hebrew calendar). In 2002 it was celebrated on November 30 - December 7.

Lighting the Menorah. A menorah holds nine candles – 8 hanukkah candles and the centre “servant” candle. The servant candle is always lit first, and used to light the other candles. The candles are placed in the holder from right to left. On the first night light the first candle, on the second night, light the second candle first, starting from the left and moving on to the right; and so on every night of Chanukah.

Spinning the Dreidel. A favourite children’s activity. Make your own from lightweight cardboard and play!

Fried foods are often eaten during Hanukkah as a reminder of the oil in the temple miracle. Try making some potato latkes.

Gelt (money) is traditionally given to children during Hanukkah. Collect funds with your Unit and donate them to the Canadian World Friendship Fund.

Chinese New Year

The Lunar New Year begins on the first new moon of the new year. The new year is welcomed as a celebration of change. In 2003, the Lunar New Year will start on February 1. This will be the year of the Ram in China.

Noodles are eaten at the start of the year to represent longevity. It is said that cutting your noodles on New Year’s Day will shorten your life.

Paper Lanterns can be made and displayed in your home.