

# Exploring Culture



*The Winter season is nearing and with it comes many celebrations. While you may or may not celebrate these holidays, you may know someone who does.*

## Winter Solstice (December 21st, 2016)

For The first day of winter occurs on or around December 22 and is the shortest day of the year in the Northern Hemisphere. *Yule (Christians); Yule (Wicca-Northern Hemisphere); Litha (Wicca-Southern Hemisphere).*

## Hanukkah (December 24th, 2016 - January 1st, 2017)

For eight days each November or December, Jews light a special candleholder called a [menorah](#). They do it to remember an ancient miracle in which one day's worth of oil burned for eight days in their temple. On Hanukkah, many Jews also eat special potato pancakes called latkes, sing songs, and spin a top called a dreidel to win chocolate coins, nuts, or raisins.

## Christmas (December 25th, 2016)

People celebrate this Christian holiday by going to church, giving gifts, and sharing the day with their families. In some parts of Europe, "star singers" go caroling — singing special Christmas songs — as they walk behind a huge star on a pole.

## Kwanzaa (December 26th, 2016 - January 1st, 2017)

[Kwanzaa](#), which means "First Fruits," is based on ancient African harvest festivals and celebrates ideals such as family life and unity. During this spiritual holiday, millions of African Americans dress in special clothes, decorate their homes with fruits and vegetables, and light a candle holder called a kinara.

## New Year's Eve/New Year's Day (December 31st, 2016 - January 1st, 2017)

People celebrate the last and first day of the Gregorian calendar. Celebration often includes, parties, food, parades and making new year resolutions or goals. Individual countries have some specific traditions and since there are so many different local times, it takes up to 26 hours for all the time zones to ring in the new year!

## Makar Sankranti (January 14th, 2017)

Makar Sankranti is one of the most auspicious days for the Hindus, and is celebrated in almost all parts of the country in myriad cultural forms, with great devotion, fervor and gaiety. The festival of Makar Sankranti traditionally coincides with the beginning of the sun's northward journey (the Uttarayan) when it enters the sign of Makr (the Capricorn). It falls on the 14th of January every year according to the solar calendar.

## Chinese New Year (January 28th, 2017)

Many Chinese children dress in new clothes to celebrate Chinese New Year. People carry lanterns and join in a huge parade led by a silk dragon, the Chinese symbol of strength. According to legend, the dragon hibernates most of the year, so people throw firecrackers to keep the dragon awake.

## Mardi Gras (February 28th, 2017)

The time of Lent is a solemn one of reflection for Christians, so the Tuesday before Lent begins is a time of merrymaking for many people around the world. In New Orleans, people wear costumes and attend huge parades for the festival of Mardi Gras. Brazil's [Carnival](#) also features parades, costumes, and music. This day is also known as Shrove Tuesday. In England, some towns have pancake contests in which women run a race while flipping a pancake at least three times.